Talking Back to the ELPAC: Resilient Resistance and (Re)Imagining Through YPARt

Zulema Reynoso

University of San Diego

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TALKING BACK TO THE ELPAC:
RESILIENT RESISTANCE AND (RE)IMAGINING THROUGH YPARt

by

Zulema Reynoso

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2023

Dissertation Committee

Cecilia A. Valenzuela, PhD, Chair
Reyes Quezada, EdD, Member
Berenice Badillo, PhD, Member

University of San Diego
University of San Diego  
School of Leadership and Education Sciences

CANDIDATE’S NAME: Zulema Reynoso

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: TALKING BACK TO THE ELPAC: RESILIENT RESISTANCE AND (RE)IMAGINING THROUGH YPARt

APPROVAL:

______________________________________, Chair  
Cecilia A. Valenzuela, PhD

______________________________________, Member  
Reyes Quezada, EdD

______________________________________, Member  
Berenice Badillo, PhD

DATE:
ABSTRACT

Policies that label and track students based on language and race dismiss the voices and lived experiences of English learners (ELs) through forced fits and ideologies that devalue multiple languaging and ways of knowing. This qualitative study explores how an educator and 20 seventh-grade bi/multilingual Latinx students labeled long-term English learners (LTELs) reimagined how language is perceived, taught, and assessed across traditional schooling contexts and language policy landscapes. Drawing from LatCrit theory, Latina/Chicana feminisms, and dimensions of youth participatory action research (YPAR), this study centered both LTELs as jóvenes educados (dignified youth) and a conceptualized taller (studio space) to affirm youth voices and agency and to critically interrogate the English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC) during mandated English language development (ELD) class sessions.

The following research questions guided this study: (1) How does an ELD space grounded in a pedagogy of resilient resistance affirm the lived experiences of bi/multilingual youth? (2) What issues/topics do youth express as important to examine about the ELPAC? (3) How can the arts provide bi/multilingual youth a way to engage with and reframe their schooling experiences? To answer these questions, a Latina/Chicana feminist framework and comics-based methods were applied to document and sketch out pláticas. Additionally, participatory tools such as inquiry and action projects were incorporated across analytical processes to uncover key themes and findings. Findings reveal these youth drew from languaging repertoires and embodied ways of knowing to collectively formulate agentive responses to microaggressions enacted by schooling policies and practices that label, track, and test them. These
responses emerged because of moves grounded in dialogical, relational, and humanizing commitments, elevating the critical consciousness of youth to inspire political and artistic activism.

Implications for practitioners and scholars seeking to disrupt the stigmatization and ineffective language services occurring in surveilled ELD classrooms include creative and unconventional approaches that replenish youth resilience for resistance and action. This dissertation argues for redistributing power and voice in classrooms to place bi/multilingual Latinx youth at the forefront of their learning as creative agents, experts, and policymakers alongside their teachers.
DEDICATION

To the angelitos of Uvalde, Texas. I hold your caritas, almas, sueños, y voces close to my heart. I do this work for you and your familias.
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I would like to thank my mother, Emma Sanchez, for modeling a lifetime of dedication and achievement in advocacy for multilingual learners. You taught me that intention is not enough. This work demands courageous action and results. I behold the mantra you instilled in me growing up and the communities you worked with, asserting, “Failure is not an option.” We’ve had a tough road, but your unique survival tactics combining grit and grace gave me the tools to traverse obstacles. I humbly stand on your shoulders. My hermanita Mabelle—thank you for being my first friend and roommate, lifelong thought partner, and fellow artistic dreamer. Even though you were 13 months late being my twin, I love that we are synchronized in thought, have the same bizarre humor, and finish each other's sentences. Your talents and commitment to seeing the good in humanity, especially in the corrections system, have transformed lives. Thank you for letting me tag along as your groupie and learn from you. I owe so much of this journey to you and your quirky, albeit effective, motivational schemes that got me to the finish line. You are my rock. To the children in our small family, I am grateful to my
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Sitting in the trailer of an overcrowded public school library minutes from the U.S.-Tijuana border, five sixth-grade students waited at a round table to begin our small group learning session. In 3 weeks of working together, I met with each student individually for almost an hour to conduct reading inventories that usually take teachers 20 minutes to administer in class. We engaged in small casual conversations during transitions between letter recognition exercises, sight word callouts, snacking, and reading comprehension retells. In these intimate exchanges, students moved freely between Spanish and English, summoning specific words from each language to capture their intended message. Despite prolonging our assessment window, these personal interactions nourished our minds and bodies by bringing us together in shared food practices and understandings about family and place. Our conversations also allowed me to attend to students’ physical and mental affect to understand when to check in with a child, take a break, or stop for the day.

During the reading inventories, I scribbled notes on my examiner’s response sheet reflecting on how students answered questions, what their speech communicated, and what their bodies were doing—the pauses, breaks, crescendos, and decrescendos in their voices, their smiles, and furrowed brows. Their hard stares at the assessment pages and my face elevated my sensibilities to the visceral human experience of testing. For example, after responding to a question or taking a risk to read an unknown word or letter, my students’ eyes would fixate on mine for an answer. These nonverbal gestures asked, “Did I get it right? Am I doing well?” I was reminded of the similar approval-
seeking look in my daughter’s eyes when I first taught her to read. I remembered the concern I held then as a mother to ensure she felt cared for and emotionally and physically protected. At that moment, I wondered who would attend to the physical and emotional needs of these resilient and knowledgeable students, especially during the rigorous high-stakes language assessment in the spring. One student in particular, Cinthia, displayed a heightened level of anxiety as she struggled with recognizing letters, words, and rhymes. During our sessions, she would often retreat beneath her oversized black coat and long straight hair that cloaked her face. Her movements and sparing speech required a particular relational connection that considered care and patience.

On our third meeting, it was time for a courageous testing conversation. Seated at a round table in the school library, we snacked on cinnamon crackers and talked about the previous assessments they had taken. We then focused on the English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC) to highlight how they must continue to take this test annually until they achieve a passing score across listening, speaking, reading, and writing domains. Upon seeing their scores and learning about their language classifications as learners of English, they grew indignant and countered the data narratives with, “This is not right, miss. I got a 700 reading Lexile. I don’t need to be in this group.” Another disputed, “I already know English. Why do I gotta keep taking this test?” Finally, Cinthia unexpectedly emerged from beneath her coat hood and looked up at me to pose a question that shocked the librarian sitting ten feet away, struck me profoundly, and continues to haunt me today. A dignified and deeply observant 11-year-old, teary-eyed Cinthia asked, “But we’ve been here since kindergarten. What happened?”
This vignette captures a recurrent phenomenon I observed across my years of teaching, where bi/multilingual learners are relegated to the peripheries of their education. Their exclusion from conversations around their positioning within achievement and policy landscapes and their uninvited participation in shaping their learning experiences result in nebulous understandings of their schooling. This vignette also exemplifies how a space of *pláticas*,¹ or informal conversations, evoked youth consciousness and voice for making meaning of their schooling experiences. In this space, the youth vocalized the dissonance between their perceived identities and those mapped upon them through race- and language-based labels. As an everyday knowledge-making practice, these *pláticas* hold the potential for intellectual, critical theorizing that can occur (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) when young people are positioned to offer counternarratives to reductive test scores and labels objectifying them based on race and language (Abril-Gonzalez & Shannon, 2021; Brooks, 2016; Castagno, 2008; Fine, 2011; González Ybarra, 2018a; Jacobs, 2008; Kibler et al., 2018; Kim & García, 2014; Mendoza, 2019; Quiroz, 2001). Furthermore, this vignette demonstrates how *pláticas* can surmount the pervasive silencing of linguistically marginalized youth in schools (Castagno, 2008) and elicit complex critical conversations among intelligent agentive youth who continue to shoulder the label of English learner (EL).

These topics and critical issues in education led me to think about ways educators can create spaces for youth to learn more about the inequities impacting their educational experiences and engage in unfettered discourse. As I discuss next, the deficit positioning

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¹ This dissertation translanguages between Spanish and English. All Spanish words are italicized to highlight their paramount significance to this study's theoretical, conceptual, and linguistic commitments.
of bi/multilingual youth within U.S. schools requires researcher–educator advocacy to elicit and elevate their voices and (re)position them as dignified critical scholars.

Statement of the Problem

The scope of harmful language and race-based labeling, testing, and tracking is expansive and deeply rooted in systems tethered to institutional logics of accountability (Friedland & Alford, 1991), funding, and systemic inequalities at the federal, state, and local levels. Policies regarding how students are labeled based on language and race and the criteria used to define student categories, particularly with language assessment data, dismiss the lived experiences of youth with forced fits and essentializations. The case of ELs who have not been reclassified to English proficient after receiving English language development (ELD) services for 6 years warrants considerable investigation. Known as long-term English learners (LTELs), these students comprise a subcategory of ELs, and most have been in U.S. schools since kindergarten (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2010; Olsen, 2014) in ELD spaces (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 depicts the problem I sought to address in my study. Included is Cinthya’s question from the opening vignette and other comments my students, predominantly LTEs, have made throughout the years about their English language education. I illustrate how labeling, testing, and tracking microaggressions occur by design to create the LTEL subgroup of ELs. These students “have not successfully passed

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2 When students enroll in California schools, a Home Language Survey is completed with four questions about the presence of another language other than English in the home. If any of these questions is answered with a “yes,” the student is assessed with an Initial English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC). If the student does not demonstrate proficiency on this assessment, they are entitled to receive language support services and are designated English learners (ELs). If after 6 or more years EL students make inadequate progress as measured by the ELPAC, they are designated long-term English learners (LTELs).
language examinations used to measure English language proficiency in American schools” (Kibler & Valdés, 2016, p. 97).

**Figure 1**

*Comic Illustration Depicting an LTEL Pathway*

English language proficiency (ELP) exams are gateways to allowing students to shed the EL label and access opportunities reserved for non-EL students. The comic (see Figure 1) also highlights how LTEL voices are silenced, their agency undermined, and how mechanical instruction is prescribed to them in what Abril-Gonzalez and Shannon (2021) called ELD *jaulas* or cages. I illustrate how these students are trapped because they cannot pass the test. I also depict teachers’ impulse to use mandated ELD instructional time to teach to the test. The result is student disengagement and fewer LTEL students who graduate from high school (Buenrostro & Maxwell-Jolly, 2021; Menken et al., 2012; Olsen, 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2022). Relegated to making sense of their identity in a system that prioritizes standard English, these students are more likely
to endure language loss in their heritage tongue (Wong Fillmore, 1991) and delayed development in “English appropriate for schooling contexts” (Kibler et al., 2018, p. 743).

Conversely, dual language programs can also produce lackluster outcomes for multilingual youth compared to their dominant monolingual counterparts (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Chaparro, 2019; Hernandez, 2017). When these programs fail to deliver high-quality instruction in any language or do not invite students’ full linguistic repertoires, they perpetuate inequities. In cases where LTEL students fall several literacy levels below grade in their heritage language and English, they are positioned to struggle with the increasing demands of curriculum content. They also are ill prepared to confront the high-stakes testing that impedes opportunities to learn and limits their access to college-prep coursework enjoyed by their non-EL peers.

Furthermore, a problem of equity exists when considering whether bi/multilingual youth perceive themselves as learners of English after receiving 6 or more years of schooling in the United States (Kim & García, 2014). These LTEL youth wield conversational English effectively and can function well in social situations (Olsen, 2010). As the opening vignette demonstrates, they regularly assert they already know English and are often resistant to being placed in ELD classes where test-prep pedagogies dominate. The EL label is mapped on students upon entering U.S. schools and cannot be shed until students are reclassified to English proficient. This linguistic designation results in embodied harm among bi/multilingual youth who endure stigmatization through segregated language services and test-prep pedagogies (Callahan, 2005; Gándara & Orfield, 2012; Rodríguez, 2013). Moreover, substandard instruction reinforces deficit
messaging that stifles their reclassification rates to English fluent, resulting in a high incidence of disengagement when students reach high school (Olsen, 2010).

This dissertation works from the assumption that when youth cultivate critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/2020) about language, labeling, and testing practices, they can be positioned to not only understand the skills needed to overcome testing obstacles through the discursive act of challenging them but also to recognize problems in how language is treated and taught in schools. Further, this dissertation draws from LatCrit (Luna, 1998; Montoya, 1994; Valdes, 2005) and raciolinguistics (Chaparro, 2019; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Orzulak, 2015) to call attention to standard English as the constructed language of power that is reinforced and reproduced in classrooms. Described by Valenzuela (1999) as subtractive pedagogies, this erasure and replacement of cultural and linguistic identities with white monolingual traditions trickles down to the schooling experiences of multilingual youth and impedes the development of “academically supportive networks” (p. 30) necessary for empowerment and activism. The consequences of these injustices enact daily microaggressions (Pierce, 1970; Solórzano, 1997; Yosso, 2000) upon youth entrenched in standard English ideologies as a function of being labeled, tracked, and tested. In conceptualizing a response to these inequities, this dissertation also draws from Latina/Chicana feminisms to reframe knowledge and uplift youth voices located on the margins. As relational tools for encouraging intimate social networks and reciprocal trust (Valle & Bensussen, 1985), critical Latina/Chicana feminists employ pláticas, or informal talk, to cultivate authentic interactions with and among youth (Abril-Gonzalez & Shannon, 2021; González Ybarra, 2018a, b). Thus, this
study also makes use of pláticas to fortify supportive networks “with teachers and among students” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 30).

In tandem with pláticas that invite diverse languaging practices and participatory action research that position youth as experts on their own lives, the arts are interwoven for making meaning, expressing, and transmitting coconstructed knowledge in youth-driven community art projects. Likewise, this study borrowed from Rendón’s (2011) definition of personas educadas\(^3\) as dignified, wise, and honorable people who are well respected, regardless of formal education and social class, to uplift the voices of bi/multilingual youth as knowledgeable and agentive. I embrace Rendón’s call to educate a younger generation of personas educadas by nurturing youth’s intellectual and emotional intelligence. Therefore, in this study, I use the term jóvenes educados in deliberate resistance to the subtractive labels mapped upon students identified as ELs, LTELs, or other labels positioning standard English as the marker by which bi/multilingual students are judged.

To situate my study, I employ critical theories, including LatCrit theory (Luna, 1998; Montoya, 1994; Valdes, 2005), raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015), and Yosso’s (2000) notion of resilient resistance. Collectively, these theories frame how “surviving and/or succeeding as a strategic response” (Yosso, 2000, p. 180) to microaggressions can occur in a system that labels bi/multilingual youth, places them on ELD tracks as a function of those labels, and uses high-stakes testing to confine them to

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\(^3\) In her article “Cultivating Una Persona Educada: A Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Vision of Education,” Rendón (2011) defined personas educadas as wise, dignified, community leaders with a strong sense of individual as well as social responsibility. Through specific pedagogical moves that “elicit habits of the mind and heart” (Rendón, 2011, p. 3), Rendon advanced that college classrooms should be sites where personas educadas are cultivated for more socially just outcomes.
perpetual EL status until they pass the test. Working with a group of 20 seventh-grade bi/multilingual youth labeled ELs, I describe how I used *pláticas* derived from Chicana feminisms and an arts-infused inquiry-based curriculum to create an affirming *taller*\(^4\) or workshop space. I detail how *pláticas* first invited youth to share, construct, and theorize their knowledge and lived experiences (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). I then describe how *pláticas* scaffolded youth inquiries, community action, and art projects to formulate a collective response to being labeled, tracked, and assessed.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

This dissertation presents key findings stemming from my work in an ELD classroom with bi/multilingual middle school youth ages 12 to 14 and attending a charter school in Southern California. Operating from within the instructional school day, I created a conceptual and concrete classroom *taller* space where *pláticas* intertwined with youth participatory action research (YPAR), arts-based inquiry, and comics-based methods. As a tool for centering the lived experiences of youth navigating injustices, YPAR positioned them as agents of change (McIntyre, 2000) while compelling adults to relinquish authority and voice. To flatten adult/youth hierarchies, threading arts- and comics-based practices provided pedagogical and methodological affordances for participatory meaning-making (Kuttner et al., 2021) and for materializing a shared cultural intimacy (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020) alongside youth. Thus, this dissertation explored the potential of youth agency in transforming their coconstructed knowledge and meaning-making experiences around language labels, testing, and

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\(^4\) This is the Spanish word for workshop or artist studio. I define *taller* as a workshop space of creative possibility for engaging in both abstract and concrete imagining and dreaming, meaning making, and repurposing of both the material and the conceptual. It is also a place of discovery and affirmation where the artist’s total self-works together to actualize new ideas and rework old ones.
tracking into creative expressions for sharing in a culminating network-wide *encuentro*\(^5\) (Caraballo et al., 2017; Fine et al., 2007; Wager et al., 2017).

In positioning youth voices for driving inquiry, dismantling, theorizing, and counterstorytelling, this dissertation was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does an English language development space grounded in a pedagogy of resilient resistance affirm the lived experiences of bi/multilingual youth?
2. What issues/topics do youth express as important to examine about the English Language Proficiency Test of California?
3. How can the arts provide bi/multilingual youth a way to engage with and reframe their schooling experiences?

The first three chapters of this dissertation establish the theoretical and conceptual commitments that informed the design and approach to data analysis. In Chapter 2, I locate my study within critical scholarship that problematizes student labeling and the hegemony of standard English imposed upon non-white, bi/multilingual learners (Addy, 2015; Leonardo, 2004; Macedo, 1991; Stein, 2001). I argue the literature on subtractive teaching pedagogies and testing practices upholds standard English’s underlying dominance as deeply entrenched in ideologies of whiteness and linguistic binaries (Chaparro, 2019; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Godley et al., 2007; Lippi-Green, 2011; Okhremtchouk et al., 2018; Shapiro, 2014; Valenzuela, 1999; Wiley & Lukes, 1996).

Following this, I assemble an affirming and humanizing pedagogy through a framework that draws from LatCrit theory and raciolinguistics (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This

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\(^5\) As a kind of group gathering, I employ this term recalling the special occasions, especially around Christmas, when families would be invited to come to my classroom, bring food, and celebrate as their children proudly presented their work or performed something special for the parents.
framework engages with Latina/Chicana feminist tools and approaches for conceptualizing a methodology rooted in what educational critical race theory scholar Yosso (2000) theorized as resilient resistance. Yosso’s framework of resilient resistance served as a blueprint for designing an approach that considered Chicana/Chicano consciousness, motivation, resistance, and agency for surviving and succeeding amid the kinds of oppressive structures such as language testing and tracking.

In Chapter 3, I outline my methodological approach to my study and establish my positionality as a first-generation Latina/Chicana/2nd generation Argentinian, the role of language in my family, and how I arrived at this work as an artist, language educator, and activist-scholar (Calderón et al., 2012). To design a methodological approach that affirms youth voices, I drew from Latina/Chicana feminist perspectives, LatCrit concepts, and Yosso’s (2000) scholarship to fashion what I call resilient resistance methodology. I describe how this approach is grounded in my experiences as a language educator navigating surveilled language spaces and high-stakes assessments. I also outline the components of this approach to infiltrate dominant ELD spaces, center youth voices as coconstructors of knowledge, and invite and affirm diverse languaging practices through pláticas and art. Following this, I describe how critical translingual approaches (Rymes et al., 2016; Schaefer & Warhol, 2020; Seltzer & de los Ríos, 2018) fuse with elements of YPAR to engage youth in interrogating, analyzing, and creating art projects to present their findings in a community encuentro. Then, I describe the jóvenes educados in this study and contextualize their schooling and participation. I conclude by discussing my process for collecting and analyzing my data using arts-based methods.
Chapters 4, 5, and 6 articulate my study’s findings. In Chapter 4, I discuss essential pedagogical findings that emerged from attending to the seen, the heard, and the embodied through *pláticas*. I detail how *pláticas* functioned as a tool for inviting youth stories and their family histories and for talking back to and about their schooling and assessment experiences. I then describe the use of comics as a pedagogical tool for visually capturing and legitimizing collective meaning making that surfaced among youth. I describe how a cycle of eliciting, memorializing, and reflecting occurred through *pláticas* and comics to transform an ELD classroom into an affirming taller space where *jóvenes educados* critically reframed language. I call this a resilient resistance pedagogy that afforded *jóvenes*: (a) license to speak freely, (b) license to speak knowledgeably, and (c) license to speak agentively.

Chapter 5 focuses on how youth marshal and apply their knowledge and agency as *jóvenes educados* to engage in YPAR. Centering youth as agents of knowledge production, YPAR is critical in nature and complements both Chicana feminist and LatCrit frameworks by reframing how knowledge is generated and elevating voices on the margins. YPAR also provides an accessible platform to begin discursive exercises with youth on language classification and the testing mechanisms that reinforce raciolinguistic (Flores & Rosa, 2015) stratification. I describe how the engagement of *pláticas* aligns with participatory discourse through the taller space to poke and prod at the ELPAC. Through the engagement of specific assignments, I detail how the *jóvenes* leveraged their lived schooling experiences as knowledge and coconstructed new knowledge to raise critical awareness about microaggressions enacted by language policies and dominant ideologies. Further, I describe how the *jóvenes* applied their
embodied and conceptual knowledge to design inquiry projects that were personally relevant to them for sharing with the community through an arts-based presentation. I draw on sentipensante pedagogies of sensing/thinking (Rendón, 2011) to further locate jóvenes educados as knowledgeable in problem solving through habits of mind and heart and as important contributors to the larger community.

In Chapter 6, I provide a more detailed account of how comics emerged as microaffirmations (Pérez Huber et al., 2021) to fortify jóvenes’ sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and social support network. I describe how the jóvenes subsequently took ownership of the comic production process and became artistic directors of their illustrated testimonios. I then center the arts-based component of the YPAR project as a platform for the jóvenes to present their culminating research findings through large-scale community paintings and individual identity poems. I detail the shift from a taller of inquiry to a profoundly relational and emotive studio taller space for the jóvenes to negotiate and nourish their resiliency in expressive modalities. Drawing on their community knowledge and experiences, I describe how the jóvenes applied new critical understandings of their schooling experiences to talk back to the master narrative through a school-wide encuentro where they exposed inequitable language classification and testing schemes. In Chapter 7, I conclude by summarizing my findings and discussing the implications of reimagining language and literacy pedagogies with bi/multilingual youth. I revisit the tensions in this policy-driven and surveilled work and ruminate on how educators can reframe their roles and infuse transformational and creative opportunities for knowledge production beyond the normative language classification and assessment structures. In discussing the outcomes of this work, I assert how a pedagogy grounded in
relational commitments that view bi/multilingual youth as *jóvenes educados* can position them as embodied intellectuals, community advocates, and contributors.

**Scholar Activism**

Often, scholars write and theorize from the margins of traditional K–12 classrooms. Because gaining researcher access to traditional school settings and classrooms is exceptionally challenging, many studies occur with the researcher as observer, as limited participant-observer, as retrospective autoethnographies, during after-school programs, or in higher education. As a researcher assuming the role of a teacher in providing state and federally mandated instructional services, the stakes were substantially higher with this study and not limited to collecting and analyzing data to investigate a phenomenon.

In addition to challenging and disrupting the systemic structures in place, I also assumed direct accountability and responsibility for ensuring youth survive and succeed despite those structures. This meant taking up relational and affirming practices with *jóvenes* while simultaneously doing the contentious work of ensuring they performed well on a test to reclassify as English proficient and obtain access to credit-yielding courses by high school. Thus, I intentionally positioned myself within these tensions as a disruptor to align with my commitments to what Latina/Chicana educational scholars Calderón et al. (2012) and Villenas (2005) defined as scholar activism. From their scholarship and work, I formulated a stance to engage in research with the community not as a neutral bystander (Villenas, 2005) but as a coconspirator⁶ (Love, 2019) alongside youth.

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⁶ In the context of confronting anti-Blackness, Love (2019) defined coconspirator as someone who is “willing to use his intersections of privilege, leverage his power” (p. 117) to stand in solidarity and
To do research on one’s students as an active ELD teacher in a K–12 classroom is as much a privilege as it is a serious responsibility. The structures beholding one to state and federal mandates, the pressures of assessment, the responsibility to parents, and accountability to the school’s administration present unique challenges for scholar-activist educators. These educators must balance their complex and often paradoxical commitments (Sosa-Provencio, 2019) to be culturally sustaining, student achievement driven, pedagogically expert, and critically conscious. For example, within a culturally proficient model, educators are encouraged to avoid an “overreliance on discrete short-term instructional strategies” (Quezada et al., 2012, p. 6) and take asset-based stances valuing EL students’ native languages and cultures. Within an ELD space, however, educators and students must contend with intimidation from language tests that do not consider the assets of bi/multilingual students and measure only the deficits. To confront the structures of oppression through a resilient resistance framework, I situated myself at the intersection of a contested space where structures of accountability, imposed by policies and mandates, converge with a responsibility to youth, their families, and the school’s educators.

Though some studies address the double-bind (Leonardo, 2003) teachers face in deploying ELD instruction (Abril-Gonzalez, 2018; Babino & Stewart, 2018) and language assessments that paralyze curricular and pedagogical innovation, there is a gap in studies that center counternarratives from youth and their perceptions of language challenge whiteness. According to Love, this requires working from inside-out to first take stock of one’s own privilege, power, and role in perpetuating oppression and then confronting these to forge more authentic relationships. In this way, I extend the term of coconspirator to encompass the role of scholar-activist in challenging inequities and shifting power dynamics across the education of bi/multilingual youth.
assessments. Researchers have conducted quantitative studies on ELP test scores comparing EL performance with non-ELs to unmask problems in reclassification procedures and flaws in the assessments resulting from inconsistent scores (Carroll & Bailey, 2016; Stephenson et al., 2004). These studies, however, overlook youth voices and reify the problematic notion that data can speak for itself. This pitfall of positioning numbers such as test scores and grades as independent, static representations of achievement gaps eliminates the human context (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Instead, researchers can take up a more Du Boisian approach to collecting good data “in a manner that allows research participants to provide more in-depth information about the statistics being collected” (Toldson, 2019, p. 8).

In approaching this work as an activist scholar, I intended to center the talents, knowledge, and voices of youth in the language education space for theorizing pedagogical power (Villenas, 2005) while applying reimagined language pedagogies in concrete ways. This study adds to the tapestry of voices captured in existing studies with counternarratives that talk back about the lived experiences of youth labeled LTEls and the language assessments that hold power over their minds, bodies, and communities (Abril-Gonzalez & Shannon, 2021; Brooks, 2016; Castagno, 2008; Fine, 2011; Jacobs, 2008; Kibler et al., 2018; Kim & García, 2014; Mendoza, 2019; Quiroz, 2001).

**Limitations**

Because my epistemological framework is grounded in decolonial commitments from Latina/Chicana feminisms, and artistic as well as cultural intuition (Bhattacharya, 2021; Delgado Bernal, 1998), the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological framing for this study forgoes positivist stances that center researcher neutrality. Instead, I draw from
Bhattacharya’s (2019) “luxury of refusing methodology” by engaging in unrestricted inquiry made possible by the relationships and trust I have nurtured with the host network of schools. In confronting traditional research approaches that value replication for yielding similar results, Bhattacharya (2021) countered, “How can they when these processes are personal, driven by researcher-participant relationships and trust developed over months of conversation, learning, and growing? This process is intuitive and one must trust their own instincts and impulses to see what unfolds” (p. 383). As a result, the embodied inquiry, sense-making, and material productions across this study arise from deep relationships cultivated with youth participants.

Furthermore, I draw from Latina/Chicana feminisms, specifically the notion of multiple subjectivities (Elenes, 1997), to negotiate the sometimes incongruous roles I assume throughout this work as researcher, scholar–activist, teacher, and youth coconspirator. For example, my stance as a raciolinguistic disruptor prompts me to make use of critical translingual approaches (Rymes et al., 2016; Schaefer & Warhol, 2020; Smith, 2019) in the classroom that honor various modes of languaging. On the other hand, encouraging sentence frames for scaffolding and preparing youth for conversations with political stakeholders reflects my complicity in perpetuating language ideologies that render possession of a certain kind of English necessary for holding the floor in political discourse.

Outside of a Chicana feminist lens, these complicated tensions risk becoming dichotomized as colonized versus liberated consciousness (Sosa-Provencio, 2019). Calderón et al. (2012) summoned Anzaldúa’s theoretical contributions to focus on alternative sources of knowledge. In doing so, they highlighted how scholars mitigate
dissonance and persist in creating transformational educational spaces by disrupting binaries. Similarly, my stance drew from these concepts to resist positivist binaries. Specifically, I embraced alternative ways of knowing (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) where knowledge is constructed from below as “positional and partial” and “beyond the limitation of an overreliance on scientific method” (Elenes, 1997, p. 367). Moreover, Elenes (2006) urged for the reclamation of voices not by way of recovery using the colonial and hegemonic tools of analysis but by deliberately changing the methodological tools used to reclaim those voices (Calderón et al., 2012). Thus, in admitting there were moments when I was colonizer and colonized (Villenas, 1996), I was also a mother figure, friend, mentor, and coconspirator (Love, 2019). Using tools such as YPAR and arts-based methods, I leaned into scholar activism for engaging in a poststructural praxis of multiple truths.

Still, there are inherent limitations to work where minors are concerned. Caraballo et al. (2017) summarized tensions and challenges to YPAR as the lack of continuity, scheduling conflicts, projects co-opted by directives, and internal politics. Though youth were positioned as drivers of inquiry and sources of constructed knowledge, constraints in scheduling and overall student retention occurred due to fluctuating student mobility. For example, of the 20 students participating in the study, one moved back to Mexico during the start of the YPAR phase, and another moved to a neighboring district near the end of our time together. Other interruptions included assemblies and revised schedules that reduced our time for ELD from 5 to 2 days a week.

A prominent critique of conducting participatory research with youth is the extent to which the adult facilitator imposes personal agendas or boundaries in the project. In
my specific role, I was a researcher and a teacher in the community. This dual role came with a unique set of responsibilities to the community to not cause harm, even as an unintended consequence of justice-oriented youth researchers. Therefore, there were a few instances where I intervened and guided youth researchers toward ethical considerations about how their projects might yield interesting albeit harmful results for the community. For example, one group wanted to test their non-EL peers with a modified ELP assessment. Inspired by the literature read in class that exposed flaws in scoring and false nonproficient scoring of ELP assessments (Carroll & Bailey, 2016), this team wanted to prove they were, in fact, as proficient as their non-EL labeled peers. After a productive discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of this design, we brainstormed other ways to obtain the desired data based on their research objectives responsibly. This instance describes the intervention of an adult in youth’s efforts to frame inquiry projects purely of their choosing, but it also demonstrates how the process remained dialogical for negotiating alternatives and preserving the “democratic context for critical participation” (Caraballo et al., 2017, p. 329).
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This dissertation is guided by the possibility of engaging transformational pedagogies in participatory ways with bi/multilingual students who experience silencing (Castagno, 2008; Crumpler et al., 2011), labeling, testing, and tracking in schools. I argue the way bi/multilingual students are labeled and tested besmirches their humanity and that of their community, consequently impacting how they are educated in U.S. schools. Reimagining how transformational pedagogies can occur requires acknowledging and operationalizing the knowledge, embodied competencies, and diverse ways in which youth make meaning. This effort demands reframing youth not as learners of another language but as jóvenes educados who are dignified, intelligent, and agentive community leaders (Rendón, 2011).

In this chapter, I first review literature linking critical frameworks to language to highlight histories and linguistic hegemonies that uphold whiteness and devalue languaging practices of Latinx bi/multilingual youth. I then focus on literature addressing the testing mechanisms and policies operating as gatekeepers to categorize, silence, and perpetuate a racialized deficit discourse about Latinx students labeled English learners (ELs) and long-term English learners (LTELs). This literature is essential to this study because the youth participants engaged with several concepts in the scholarship throughout the class curriculum and designed inquiry and action projects in response. Lastly, I outline a conceptual framework informed by Chicana feminisms and the use of pláticas (casual conversations) to foreground how we might reimagine pedagogies for affirming students’ identities in the space of language education and testing. A
“reimagined pedagogy” is useful for dismantling harmful and ineffective practices in language learning spaces because it centers youth’s individual and collective voices, minds, and bodies and deliberately attends to their resilience before addressing content standards and testing. The participatory and critical praxis that issues from this theoretical framing inform my decision to fuse youth participatory action research (YPAR) and arts-based research to design my study for transformational possibilities.

**Background to the Chapter**

Language as a human right and as a determinant of social identity is foundational to learning and development in all students (Biseth, 2009; Hakuta, 2018). In the context of educational equity, the discourse on language development in the United States primarily focuses on persons belonging to language minority groups. Historically, students with primary languages other than English have been at the center of language-based policy and reforms. Despite efforts to develop more culturally responsive learning conditions for diverse learners (Gorski, 2016; Quezada et al., 2012), bi/multilingual students remain compartmentalized within mainstream populations geographically, linguistically, socially, and culturally. Shaped by underlying political, social, and economic agendas, the numerous labels that have emerged to define language minority groups have yielded racial and linguistic contradictions about how students are included and excluded across race-based and language-based categories. In the following sections, I review the literature on LatCrit and raciolinguistic ideologies and Latina/Chicana feminist perspectives for framing alternative approaches. Before this, I briefly outline labeling practices and policies to highlight the political and economic dimensions that complicate reform.
Labels and Marginalization of Bi/Multilingual Learners

For this literature discussion, I deliberately employ the terms EL and LTEL to problematize how these labels appear in policies governing the education of bi/multilingual learners and serve to objectify and marginalize this group. Paradoxically functioning as both a barrier and an opportunity, labeling students as ELs impacts the services they receive and guarantees funding and access to programs that promise and promote English proficiency and literacy. Incongruously, the label and others like it, such as the former federally adopted limited English proficient (LEP) label, are replete with raciolinguistic (Rosa & Flores, 2017) undertones. These deficit labels shape educator perceptions (Wiley & Lukes, 1996), subject bi/multilingual students to pernicious assessment and tracking schemes, and potentially deny access to optimal learning conditions and opportunities primarily reserved for English-only students (Shapiro, 2014).

In deploying the California English Learner Roadmap (California Department of Education, 2017), the California State Board of Education (SBE) mandated students classified as ELs are entitled to receive a culturally responsive curriculum and instruction. To provide further guidance, the California English Learner Roadmap: *Strengthening Comprehensive Educational Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners* (Hakuta, 2018) clarified policy goals and provided examples from the field. This document addresses the need for integrated and designated ELD\(^7\) in and through subject matter learning and across the curriculum to underscore the achievement of ELs.

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\(^7\) Title 5 California Code of Regulations [CCR] Section 11300(a) defines this as “instruction provided during a protected time in the regular school day for focused instruction on the state-adopted ELD standards. During Designated ELD, English learners develop critical English language skills necessary for accessing academic content in English.”
as the responsibility of all educators, not only bilingual instructional staff. These stated efforts to develop more culturally and linguistically responsive programs and approaches to teaching multilingual students appear in state, federal, and local policies. Like the CA EL Roadmap, the California frameworks for English language arts and ELD champion linguistic diversity and promote advocacy and responsibility for students’ lived experiences in developing language and nurturing identity.

Despite decades of professional development and Title III funding channeled to serve this target group, a continued lack of progress among ELs yields an increasing number of LTEL students (Cashiola & Potter, 2020). Composing between one quarter and one half of the 4.9 million ELs in U.S. schools (MacFarland et al., 2019), LTELs are students who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for more than 6 years and are making inadequate progress toward English proficiency. In California, of the 3.4 million students in Grades 6–12, 13% (442,000) are ELs. Among the 13% of ELs, 46% are LTELs. Despite the absence of disaggregated data for LTEL high school graduation rates, only 69% of ELs graduated in 2019–2020 (Buenrostro & Maxwell-Jolly, 2021). With a greater likelihood of dropping out of school by the time they reach ninth grade, LTELs have a minimal chance of reclassification as English proficient and remain caught in an amaranthine cycle of testing and lackluster opportunities to learn (Olsen, 2010).

LatCrit Theory and Raciolinguistic Ideologies

This dissertation draws from critical theoretical engagements from raciolinguistic ideologies (Chaparro, 2019; Flores & Rosa, 2015) and LatCrit theory for examining intersectionalities of racism (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), the oppressive phenomenon of race- and language-based labeling, and the hegemony of standard English
imposed upon non-white ELs. Examining the labeling structures imposed upon bi/multilingual students foregrounds discussions about the schooling and assessment experiences that render them silent and underachieving.

Extending the foundational work of civil rights activists Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman and the critical legal studies movement to the field of education, Ladson-Billings (1999) maintained “CRT can be a powerful explanatory tool for the sustained inequity that people of color experience” (p. 18). Ladson-Billings’s (1999) discussions on CRT capture the notion of property rights and citizenship and describe how these privileges, reserved for and codified by white males, subsequently permeate the educational system. Extending this notion of traditional privileges that withhold advantages to the Latinx community (Valdes, 2005), LatCrit legal scholars (Luna, 1998; Valdes, 2005) linked social and legal inequalities that masquerade as equality and democracy to deeply rooted histories of conquest and colonialism. After the signing of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, for example, Mexican Americans were divested of their codified civil and property rights when government entities and white elites resolved to usurp their land and dilute their power. Mexican Americans’ legal rights were further eroded in arbitrary court rulings that nullified their status as the “other white” (Miguel & Valencia, 1998), which resulted in the loss of racial capital and equality before the law. In a move that challenged the constitutional supremacy of treaties, the congressional passage of the California Land Act of 1851 placed insurmountable burdens on Mexican American land grantees to prove their rightful ownership, resulting in substantial land dispossession (Luna, 1998).
Through schemes that linked power to land ownership for the exclusive benefit of white males, federal and local governments divested Mexican Americans of any social, political, and linguistic authority. This divestiture would trickle down to educational contexts as Mexican Americans engaged in heated battles over curriculum, language, and control of their local schools along the southwestern states (Everett, 1984). Therefore, the notion of language and how it is taught is replete with historical lineages and raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015). These marginalizing principles intentionally uphold standard English as valuable property and as a gatekeeper to exclude bi/multilingual learners, in concert with the assumption that any other linguistic derivation or dialect that is not standard English is considered deficit.

Though LatCrit theory functions not as a twin but rather as a close cousin to CRT (Valdes, 1996), CRT and LatCrit theory intersect at two key points: (a) standard English language hegemony and (b) labeling and student classification. A framework drawing from critical race and LatCrit optics furnishes a productive platform for examining how student languages are perceived in U.S. schools and society. This framework also calls attention to how those perceptions are institutionalized as inclusive or exclusive to different student groups, especially Latinx youth, through language-based labeling.

Throughout much of his writing, Leonardo (2002) delved into the question of race from multiple perspectives that span ethnicities and histories. In his studies on whiteness and globalization discourse, Leonardo detailed the histories of Latino, Asian, and Irish immigrants in the United States to highlight how racial constructs shift over time. Leonardo explained these constructs are shaped by political and economic factors that invite some groups to participate in the white circle, offer leniency to those who merit
commendations for their approximation of whiteness and white pursuits, and exclude others with no hope of ever obtaining access. In his discourse on critical social theory and transformative knowledge, Leonardo (2003) provided a rapt account of the relationship between race and linguistic matters. Delving into the question of race from multiple perspectives that span ethnicities and histories, his discourse on critical social theory and transformative knowledge linked race to language by pointing out the dangers of uncritical literacy programs that dismiss underlying political purpose. Leonardo (2004) merged the ideas of several scholars, including Hopson’s (2003) “problem of the language line” and Bourdieu’s (1991) ideas on linguistic capital with the color line from Du Bois (2015) to convey “language learning is never just about induction into mainstream schooling but a way to perpetuate linguistic racism, in this case through the hegemony of English” (p. 14). Further, CRT operates with the assumption that racism is normalized and persistent in American life, resulting from being deeply embedded in cultural mainstream perceptions. As part of a drop-down menu of socially sanctioned classifications, race appears normalized when clustered together with different ethnic groups. Consequently, the sharp inequalities between racial groups are eclipsed, and linguistic minority group identities are diluted.

Ladson-Billings (1999) asserted the manner in which we regard race and its use is “so complex that even when it fails to ‘make sense’ we continue to employ and deploy it” (p. 9). The closely related assumption of race as socially constructed is nourished by this broad acceptance of “fixed-ness” where all people are measured against normative categories of whiteness. Categories, however, can shift when an individual can demonstrate more whiteness than another. The English language provides a vehicle for
achieving fluidity toward whiteness that has the potential for traversing race. Ladson-Billings (1999) offered a personal example being an African American female academic as “sometimes positioned as conceptually white in relation to, perhaps, a Latino, Spanish-speaking gardener” (p. 10).

Attributing her class and social position to her “white” moment, Ladson-Billings (1999) fell short of crediting her underlying command of an academic English language that afforded her access to advanced degrees and social status. Regardless of accent, race, or social status, the capital accompanying a doctoral degree from a university in the United States denotes linguistic privilege that is more difficult for Latinx communities to access. However, constructing a comparative portrait of the Latino, Spanish-speaking gardener invites dangerous assumptions that touch upon race, immigrant status, second language status, working-class status, and situational context. For example, I know many Spanish-speaking stewards of the land who bring their young adult children to work alongside them during summers when school is not in session. One father and son pair particularly come to mind. Both wearing wide-brimmed straw hats, this father-son duo’s sun-drenched brown bodies communicated in Spanish as they attended to beautifying the neighborhood plant life. The pair would work together all summer until it was time for the son to return to college. Though the son received his teaching degree and his master’s degree in special education, he still accompanied his father to work from time to time to help. This story raises several questions about intersectional identities that complicate deficit assumptions and raciolinguistic implications regarding Spanish speakers’ levels of English. Some considerations include whether Spanish-speaking individuals possess the privileged register of academic, standard English schools endeavor to inculcate in
students and whether Latinx individuals start with less or more capital than others in approximating whiteness.

**Foundations of English Language Hegemony**

The lineage that gave way to the commodification and pervasive hegemonic status of the English language originates with European invasion, expansion, and exploitation of foreign markets and commodities. European colonizers dominated, eradicated, and replaced the colonized’s cultural, social, physical, economic, and political lives with western definitions for what is deemed normal and what is considered pedigree (Lomawaima, 1995). LatCrit scholars interrogate modern western imperialism that no longer requires viceroy-like installations to establish spheres of influence. Longstanding domination has ripened into ideology, binding to subjugated peoples and lands, including U.S. society and its ironclad link to English language hegemony.

Macedo et al. (2015) focused on the existence of an ideology within our education system that goes either unnoticed or consciously ignored by educators who have “blindly embraced a positivistic mode of inquiry which enables them to deny outright the role of ideology in their work” (p. 10). Calling out the various policy-based assaults on bilingual education and the colonial hegemony of the English language, Macedo et al. addressed the insidious agendas responsible for subordinating language students to mechanical instruction and colonial education ideology. For students whose heritage language is not English, the application of “racist labels such as ‘limited-English proficiency students’ or ‘non-English speakers’” (Macedo et al., 2015, p. 10) reflects dominant society’s colonial proclivities. Extending this notion, Godley et al. (2007) exposed language ideologies that surface in English classes as daily grammar editing and oral language practice exercises
to uphold standard English as paramount. These practices affirm “the existence of the intimate interrelationship between society’s discriminatory practices and the savage inequalities that shape the mis-education of linguistic minority students” (Godley et al., 2007, p. 51). If race is a social construct, how does language-based labeling reflect that construct?

Rodríguez (2013) outlined a test-prep pedagogy culture permeating the schooling experiences of low-income students of color and linguistically marginalized students who do not meet English standards on annual language assessments. Forced to “double-up” on additional sections of English as a second language (ESL), the teaching of standard English remains the preferred mode of language instruction (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). A transmission model for language learning positions teachers as the primary source and model for mainstream English (Morales & Hartman, 2019), assuming students should emulate and internalize the language input. This model discourages use of students’ home languages and positions them as inferior. Moreover, it diminishes community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) through subtractive assimilation that is detrimental to the political and financial advancement of Latinx individuals (Valenzuela, 1999).

LatCrit theory critically strikes linguistic hegemonies such as the monolingual American cultural standard. The notion of “English as knowledge and learning” (Saavedra et al., 2009) driving classroom pedagogy asserted English as the dominant western language. For example, in establishing the urgency and importance of English language mastery, documents such as English language arts and ELD frameworks and roadmaps emphasize neoliberal aspirations aimed at growing global, economic, and social wealth (California Department of Education, 2017). Linguistic hegemony is also
reified in the United States by institutional logics of accountability (Friedland & Alford, 1991) and standardized assessments (Daruwala et al., 2021) determining college and career readiness. Literally and figuratively, ELP equips students with codes of power (Delpit, 1988) for success in the dominant culture (Saavedra et al., 2009). This social design enables ideologies about the English language as linked to first-world status to permeate the U.S. education system. Thus, this capitalistic view of pedagogy and language situates ELs within the language commodification conglomerate of strategic labeling connected to school and program funding and the for-profit assessment industry that stands to benefit from this system (Saavedra et al., 2009).

**Hegemonic Discourse and Standard English**

Across the literature, the notion of deficit discourse has emerged as a consistent theme. Scholars have addressed the topic of language ideology as paradoxically fixed yet continuously adapted over time. For example, the hegemony of the English language is deeply entrenched in the foundational landscape of this nation and is fundamentally unchanged. Nonetheless, the literature also has conveyed how reforms in state and federal language policies and locally imposed mandates evolved to protect the dominance of the English language, specifically standard English. Since the 19th-century Reconstruction Era, English language exams and literacy requirements have excluded individuals from voting, immigrating, and securing employment (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). Across California’s history, the consequences of various policies, such as the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, California’s Proposition 227, which thwarted access to bilingual education classes (Hakuta, 2018), and the power of local education agencies (LEAs) in subjectively and arbitrarily determining the criteria for EL reclassification...
(Okhremtchouk et al., 2018), exemplify how dominant language ideologies can mobilize to account for demographic fluctuations, demands by immigrant populations, and social movements from marginalized groups attempting to question or assert their power.

Wiley and Lukes (1996) described the foundations undergirding language-based deficit discourses by exposing the linguistic double standard between bilingual education and foreign language instruction despite the efforts of well-intentioned educators (Yoon, 2008). For example, bilingualism is perceived as a deficit that must be subtractively remedied by purging the first language and replacing it with standard English. In contrast, acquiring a language second to English is a desirable asset for educated elites seeking higher education (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). This dichotomy, characterized by its emphasis on English monolingualism and standard English, reifies raciolinguistic ideologies on two fronts. The first pathologizes speakers of non-English languages such as ELs, and the second stigmatizes speakers of African American, Mexican American, Hawai’ian-American, and Native American languages. Credited with developing the concept of raciolinguistic ideologies, Flores and Rosa (2015) referred to the “white gaze” that “sanctions the white perspective as the legitimate view by which the linguistic practices of racialized communities should be judged” (pp. 150–151) and by extension, how they should be treated in the educational system.

**How Silence Legitimizes Whiteness in Schools**

To prove discourses matter, Crumpler et al. (2011) highlighted the challenges regarding researcher positionality, representation, and the construction of difference as a launching point to reflexively analyze the researcher’s own practices in a study exploring multilingualism, multiliteracies, and teacher development. The researchers’ intentions in
planning and carrying out a study group to help bolster teachers’ professional knowledge regarding literacy instruction for multilingual learners took an unexpected detour as teachers pathologized and discursively victimized their ELs through their discussions. Meanwhile, the researchers silently recorded the interactions. In revisiting their silence, the researchers experienced reflexive regret, described as performative consensus or complicity with teachers’ pathologizing views about ELs.

This study unmasks pervasive deficit discourses among education practitioners and cautions about the common bystander effect that potentially reproduces raciolinguistic ideologies. In observing how pathologizing comments about EL students were circulated by general education teachers and teachers of elective courses, Crumpler et al. (2011) observed the reproduction of ideology through daily performance and casual interactions between faculty about language and literacy. The discursive production of difference, us (teachers) versus them (i.e., ELs), created insidious binaries that heroized all teachers do and disparaged how ELs continue to disappoint by not rising to the occasion and capitalizing on the resources they are afforded. Researchers observed this derisive narrative spread freely among teachers despite the body language of some faculty members who were visibly uncomfortable with the pathologizing conversation, yet they elected to remain silent.

Ethnographic studies on teacher silence and student silencing have shaped discussions about colormuteness (Castagno, 2008) and on students reprimanded to silence to legitimate whiteness whenever topics of race arise or when unsanctioned use of languages other than standard English are spoken. The theme of silence described in Crumpler et al. (2011) coincides with the silences created by race-neutral colorblind
positions that furnish a forgiving space for passively enacting whiteness and protecting privilege (Chubbuck, 2004). White middle-class educators’ fear in response to topics of diversity and power is informed by a perceived threat to their comfortable and ideological safety of middle-class values (Castagno, 2008). Cummins (1986) referred to the way schools limit speakers as controlled discourse, and Brodkey (1987) asserted the systematic commitment of public schools to censuring uncomfortable or controversial topics that may raise questions of social justice. This troubling trend hinders the potential for transformational or emancipatory outcomes for students and continues to fuel critical scholarly discourse.

**Raciolinguistic Structures and the Assessment Practices Sustaining Them**

The raciolinguistic perspective advanced by Flores and Rosa (2015) examined “the interplay of language and race within the historical production of nation-state/colonial governmentality, and the ways that colonial distinctions within and between nation-state borders continue to shape contemporary linguistic and racial formations” (p. 623). Whether by co-naturalizing deficit discourses of race and language (Smith, 2019) or enacting concrete policies that dubiously purport to center on student needs, the raciolinguistic perspective merges critical language research with critical race scholarship to scrutinize the policies and practices affecting marginalized learners. These understandings are significant because educators come to language teaching and learning spaces from race-neutral, language-neutral stances upholding myths of meritocracies and blame students for unsuccessful outcomes.

In 1998, California passed Proposition 227, which eroded bilingual education programs in public schools. Scholars challenged the decision with empirical studies on
language acquisition and the benefits of bilingual education in language and literacy education (Cummins, 1992; Hakuta et al., 2000). On the social justice front, scholarship emphasized the role of language as more than a mere code. However, there was restraint in interrogating the dominant language ideologies informing language policies and implementation (Wiley & Lukes, 1996).

Not all scholars agreed removing bilingual education from schools was a racially motivated maneuver. Informed by a framework and methodology contrary to critical social theory and representing the perspectives of the non-Latinx conservative group lobbying for the policy, Bali (2001) argued Proposition 227 did not hurt bilingual LEP students. Bali developed her research methodologies around reproductions of capitalist ideologies gilded as concerns about the “Hispanic-White” achievement gap. With explicit assumptions about the social and linguistic deficits of Latinx populations, Bali connected English proficiency to educational attainment and access to the labor market. The pejorative title of Bali’s study, “Sink or Swim,” pathologized Latinx bilingual ELs left to either survive or perish, as if by mere self-determination, in the face of having their bilingual services confiscated.

This implicit deficit framework foregrounds Bali’s (2001) data analysis referring to the 1-year results as “unexpected” against a backdrop of critics arguing Proposition 227 as racially motivated. Bali instead claimed the data revealed scores of students no longer afforded bilingual services were no worse than nonbilingual ELs. Beyond the question of constructing generalizations based on only 1 year of data and on the results being minimally altered from the previous year, the dangers of operating with this kind of
methodological reductionism that constructs educational narratives on test scores alone deny the complexity within racial or ethnic groups (Warikoo & Carter, 2009).

Bali (2001) viewed each group in the study as a monolithic entity, dismissive of the multidimensional typologies of ELs. Moreover, without disaggregating the groups to account for student profiles that consider home language literacies, language test scores, the possibility that the bilingual group may be comprised of large populations of “newcomers,” or that the nonbilingual group of ELs may contain LTELs who inherently have had more exposure to English, leaves much room for interrogation. Warikoo and Carter (2009) asserted, at the intersections of race and ethnicity and with deliberate efforts to capture “temporal, contextual, and dynamic dimensions and effects . . . it is simply dangerous to attribute schooling behaviors to a singular racial, ethnic or cultural identity” (p. 385).

Among the factors contributing to problematic achievement outcomes for bi/multilingual learners is the disproportionate significance assigned to standardized test scores, especially at the secondary level, and the consequent placement of students in either remedial or language-support courses (Shapiro, 2014; Warikoo & Carter, 2009). For ELs, the complicated path to reclassification, the lack of uniform policies and definitions, including multiple testing measures that are often redundant, contribute to their Sisyphean progress when tracked in coursework that does not count toward high school graduation (Okhremtchouk et al., 2018). In a study on EL African refugee students, Shapiro (2014) employed CRT to examine how students experienced deficit discourse at their school because of testing and tracking and the counternarratives they offered to resist marginalization. Shapiro’s qualitative study was galvanized by the
impassioned responses of ELs after a local newspaper published the school’s standardized scores first by socioeconomic status, then by singling out the lower scores of African refugee students. Shapiro extended Bigelow’s (2010) transdisciplinary work with refugee and immigrant populations to examine how students negotiated and challenged discourse about essentialization, EL deficit ideologies, labeling, the role of standardized testing, and the public dissemination of racist ideologies through the media.

ELP assessments play a critical role in demarcating student language classifications. In California, the English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC) determines whether ELs can be “reclassified” as English proficient (Ferlazzo, 2020) and serves as a gatekeeper to credit-yielding courses for high school completion as well for college and career readiness. Unlike the permanency of race-based classifications, language classifications are intended to be temporary with the defined goal of ELP for students who can succeed in English-medium learning environments without language support (Carroll & Bailey, 2016). Though policies on classification toward “English fluent” by ELP examination are designed to provide a valid and comparable method for measuring students’ language development, scholars raise concerns about EL misclassification resulting from assessment imprecision (Wolf et al., 2010). The lack of uniform definitions for language minority students also produces disparate understandings informing how ELs are perceived (Carroll & Bailey, 2016; Wolf et al., 2010). Literature analyzing EL and non-EL performance on the Stanford ELP assessment to validate and calibrate proficient and nonproficient classifications revealed flaws when some non-EL students were classified as nonproficient (Stephenson et al., 2003, 2004). Notably, the studies did not disclose student demographics despite the
potential impact on implications if participants come from high socioeconomic or East Asian communities that experience accelerated reclassification rates (Greenberg Motamedi et al., 2016). Further notable is the potential conflict with the study’s corporate underwriter that also generates the assessment.

Conversely, Carroll and Bailey’s (2016) descriptive study of randomly selected samples of fifth-grade EL and non-EL students transparently disclosed participant demographics for measuring mean differences between ELs and non-ELs. This study interrogated the validity of decision rules linked to testing practices and reclassification policies. Of the four decision rule models available to states for determining reclassification to English fluent, conjunctive models adopted by states such as California apply decision rules requiring ELP assessment proficiency across all four domains in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Carrol and Bailey’s findings revealed 27.2% of the non-ELs, which included 93.5% white students, and 56.9% of predominantly Latinx ELs (85.1%) were found to be nonproficient on the ELP assessment. Despite scoring proficient or advanced on the state’s standards-based achievement assessment, these students were ineligible for reclassification according to conjunctive decision rules.

Across the assessment landscape, quantitative mechanisms for measuring validity, comparability, and reliability can approximate colorblind approaches. When considering the decision-making impact on individual students, these false performances of equity risk misclassifying students in ways that can deny, prematurely end, or unnecessarily prolong language-based designations. Toldson (2019) contended the notions of “academic achievement” as a predictor for positive life outcomes and the “academic
achievement gap” as a predictor of social inequities are, in fact, social constructs that operationalize indicators to “help oppressors ‘create’ social inequities” (p. 5).

Moreover, the disconnect between testing, reclassification practices, and the teaching and learning landscapes have yet to intersect for aligning mandated expectations to instructional practice and ultimately to high-stakes assessment (Wolf et al., 2010) that could generate change in student achievement and language development. Because most teachers do not administer ELP assessments to their students, they are often ill equipped to understand student scores; the language demands placed upon students and the ELD standards they must teach (Mitchell, 2019). Altogether, these articles add to a body of qualitative and quantitative studies that problematize the deficit labeling of bi/multilingual students and unmask flaws and inconsistencies with scoring practices (Carroll & Bailey, 2016; Stephenson et al., 2004) in the ELP assessments reinforcing those labels. However, these studies are limited in their acute focus on testing, and they overlook student voices and reify the problematic notion that data can speak for itself.

In addressing how language and literacy are taught at the intersection of race and language, the literature revealed policies, theories, methodologies, and assessments are interconnected and work in tandem to inform English language arts instruction. Policies tied to funding, including Titles I and III as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, establish the various terminology for categories that determine how schools receive funds to provide services based on socioeconomic and linguistic needs. The policies first identify and name the target groups requiring services, creating categorization machinations that get “mapped onto the
students as part of their school-based identities” (Stein, 2001, p. 138) and materialize in teacher practice and testing.

Accounting for all key participants within a study, including the researchers, Crumpler et al. (2011) employed positioning theory to document how EL students are positioned within classrooms. Crumpler et al. captured how educators implement their own deficit-based or asset-based pedagogies with students and the heritage languages they bring to the classroom. Scholars problematized naming practices at the institutional and policy levels to reveal incongruencies between the definitions for race-based and language-based categories and the lived experiences of students within those groups. Regarding naming practices that reproduce linguistic ideologies and how these are enacted in classrooms, Stein (2001) observed “over time the labels acquire students rather than the students acquiring labels” (p. 138).

**An Alternative Language Framing: Latina/Chicana Feminist Perspectives**

As a framework and a lens for carrying out and interpreting educational research with bi/multilingual youth, Latina/Chicana feminist epistemology is vital for reconceptualizing Latinx ELs/LTELs because it dignifies them as knowledgeable beings who can speak directly to injustices they have endured across labeling, tracking, and testing schemes. Latina/Chicana feminisms can make space for drawing out youth voices for surfacing narratives of resilience amid microaggressions in language teaching and learning spaces by focusing on the historical, affective, and embodied experiences of bi/multilingual learners. Elevating youth’s voices and lived experiences can lead to dismantling deficit master narratives that construct Latinx youth as silent, unmotivated,
and delinquent and can usher in a political and participatory praxis to position youth as agentive and as sources of knowledge production (Delgado Bernal, 2001).

LatCrit and Latina/Chicana feminisms concern themselves with embodied experiences and knowledge of individuals on the periphery of larger social justice movements such as critical race and Chicanismo. Similar to LatCrit’s emphasis on the complexity of Latino/Latina identities (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), Latina/Chicana feminist thought acknowledges the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality obscured within patriarchal and liberal scholarship (Delgado Bernal, 1998). This lens is useful when looking at ELs, especially LTELs, for recognizing the complexity of their multiple identities and linguistic typologies. Conceptualizing intersectionalities among bi/multilingual youth is critical for knowing and understanding the tensions they navigate in their everyday lives as “belonging” and “not belonging” along figurative and literal linguistic borderlands (Elenes, 1997). In addition to negotiating the many layers of their adolescent selves, bi/multilingual youth must contend with meaning making about their positioning across fluctuating cultural, linguistic, geographic, and social circumstances. In speaking to hybrid identities, Anzaldúa’s (1987) *Borderlands* theories are fundamental in this context for framing pedagogies that affirm diverse languaging practices of LTEL youth who “cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English” (p. 77) and who must innovate languaging practices of their own.

**Disrupting Binaries**

In challenging traditional ways of knowing grounded in patriarchal stances, Chicana feminist scholars advance understandings of their life experiences as legitimate
knowledge (Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998). Embedded in these experiences are deep negotiations of contradictions of self as imposed by society and reproduced in schools that stigmatize and devalue the race, cultures, and languages of Latinx/Chicanx youth. In response, Chicana feminisms cultivate and encourage “a tolerance for contradictions and a tolerance for ambiguity” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79). As an ethic for framing and deploying research, dissonance and ambiguity open possibilities for discovery along the margins where alternative narratives, truths, and silenced voices reside. Alternative sources of knowledge trouble binary constructions by remaining open to other perspectives (Anzaldúa, 2002; Villenas, 1996), namely those from in-between spaces. In conceptualizing the complexities of languaging practices among Latinx youth and their communities, *borderland* theories have been used to rupture Spanish/English dichotomies and highlight dynamic and hybrid languages occurring in liminal spaces (Hamilton, 2019).

Alternative sources of knowledge are nonbinary, like our bodies (the embodied), histories, homes, and languaging practices, including the unspoken (Calderón et al., 2012), that often go unnoticed in classrooms. These comprise everyday sites of knowledge occurring in marginal spaces nourished and protected by scholar-activists who deliberately locate themselves in this work as researcher-educators and advocates who seek to reclaim youth voices (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). In materializing these aspirations, Delgado Bernal (1998) proposed a process that coalesces the “experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic” (p. 568). Framing this as “cultural intuition,” she outlined four sources informing this perspective, including personal experience, engaging with existing literature, summoning professional experience, and
performing analytical research with thorough data. Chicana scholars operationalize cultural intuition in educational research in ways that approximate Corbin and Strauss’s (1990) theoretical sensitivity about imparting data with meaning. Unlike Corbin and Strauss, Delgado Bernal’s (1998) notion of cultural intuition does not bracket lived experiences and memories from the personal, the collective, and the community. Thus, Chicana feminist scholars (Anzalduá, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Pérez, 1999; Sandoval, 2000) marshal their cultural intuition to perform research as embodied activist scholars to better articulate the existence of new knowledge in “the unheard, the unthought, the unspoken” (Pérez, 1999, p. 5) in liminal spaces.

From a researcher perspective, working within Chicana feminist spaces requires deliberate acknowledgment of the continued and “historical devaluation of Spanish” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 562) across the educational experiences of Latinx youth. Nevertheless, these histories are also replete with accounts of Chicana resistance linked to the everyday intersectional struggles of Latinx/Chicanx youth in schools. These understandings are needed to carry out research alongside adolescent bi/multilingual youth participants and for blurring binaries across research methodologies, relational distributions of power, and knowledge hierarchies. Acknowledging and acting on relational imbalances is especially important for activist scholars who conduct research with Latinx bi/multilingual youth because they are taking a stance that rejects neutrality and objectivity, prioritizing instead advocacy and efforts that address community concerns (Delgado Bernal, 2020).
Reclaiming Voices

Within Latinx/Chicanx communities, pláticas as conversations for teaching and learning, meaning making, negotiating identity, chisme gossiping, storytelling, and exchanging consejos, are deeply embedded practices within a larger system of knowing. Employed methodologically, Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) outlined five principles for using pláticas in research, including drawing from Latina/Chicana feminist theory, positioning participants as co-constructors of knowledge, honoring everyday lived experiences as connected to the research inquiry, providing a space for healing, and practicing reciprocity and vulnerability.

Within the space of teaching and learning, especially in the context of engaging the deficit labels and language assessments enacted upon bi/multilingual learners, pláticas encourage trust, humor, healing, and knowledge creation. Pláticas also tap into familiar spaces of casual conversations occurring in Chicana/Latinx homes and provide a platform for reciprocity (Valle & Bensussen, 1985) that can temper imbalances of power or age when working with jóvenes, or youth. In contrast to other modes of inquiry that employ extractivist methods with participants, pláticas offer dialogic opportunities for intellectual theorizing. For linguistically marginalized students who are rendered silent in classrooms, pláticas “allow them to assess or theorize about their own lived experiences” (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 109).

Pedagogies of Home and Everyday

The margins within the educational system are marked by historical, linguistic, racial, and cultural entanglements excluding Latinx bi/multilingual youth, their families, and their communities. Each day, bi/multilingual Latinx communities are relegated to the
peripheries of learning institutions when their children leave their *mochilas*, or backpacks, on hooks outside classrooms. Within these *mochilas* are children’s cultural, familial, and linguistic education inculcated in their homes. When this knowledge does not approximate white, middle-class, native English-speaking values, it is excluded from formal learning spaces. This exclusion marginalizes the pedagogical work of mothers who stow in their child’s *mochilas* lovingly prepared homemade lunches to feed and satiate them and handwritten *bendiciones*, or blessings, offering protection and love on napkins tucked inside foil wrapping.

Latina/Chicana feminisms legitimize pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001), affirm family histories and borderland geographies (Villenas, 2006), and function to disrupt normative pedagogies that prioritize assessment scores and banking methods of teaching and learning (Freire, 1970/2020). Within the litany of pedagogies of the home are *consejos*, nurturing advice (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994), that are central to Latinx didactic traditions for transmitting community, familial, and cultural values and stories. *Consejos* represent important lessons a child internalizes about their role within the home and their community. Both spoken and performed, *consejos* are embodied in the lived experiences children observe in their parents (Villenas, 2006), their work ethic, their navigation of political and economic systems, and their implicit or explicit emphasis on the importance of education. *Consejos* can emerge in casual *pláticas*, as *bendiciones* on napkins, and even in *regañadas*, or scoldings, that caution about mysterious individuals or supernatural entities who take naughty children who stray from their parents’ advice. *Consejos* also shape how a child makes sense of their world inside the home. More importantly, “they establish a sense of self-worth and build resistance against the
challenges faced outside the home” (Espino, 2016, p. 186). More profound expressions of these feminist pedagogies are found within Latina mother pedagogies that involve “the larger processes of educating their children within a transformative project of creating more humane and just social relations” (Villenas, 2005, p. 274). Collectively, these pedagogies represent the dignity, compassion, sense of community, and resilience inside the mochilas of Latinx students who must endure the reductive label of EL.

**Transformational Pedagogies and YPAR**

Throughout this dissertation, I argue the importance of employing transformational pedagogies that not only promote critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/2020) among students labeled as ELs but also offer a nurturing space for students to leverage their knowledge, voices, and whole selves in creative expression for talking back to the test in a manner of their choosing. Through YPAR, social consciousness and power are born out of youth “possessing critical knowledge of the true workings of their social contexts” (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 7). In decolonizing methods of inquiry (Paris & Winn, 2013) for studying marginalized communities, including youth populations, YPAR emerged as a critical methodology to position youth participants as owners and producers of knowledge (Caraballo et al., 2017). Vaccarino-Ruiz et al. (2021) further described how applying a liberation psychology lens to YPAR revealed how the democratization of knowledge can occur when the narratives and experiences of oppressed people, such as youth, are centered.

According to Caraballo et al. (2017), the proliferation of published YPAR studies occurred within the last approximately 20 years. As the earliest study to name and employ YPAR, McIntyre (2000) offered youth participants in his study “the opportunity
to speak about their lives” (p. 126). He situated himself as a researcher, not by extracting stories of violence and despair, but by “collaborating with them in designing plans of action to address their concerns (p. 126). McIntyre (2000) asserted when youth drive action programs to improve their communities, “we can more effectively frame research questions and teaching pedagogies around their understandings of violence and urban life” (p. 126).

Still, Caraballo et al. (2017) cautioned against the fetishization of YPAR as a cure all for youth-related inequities and stressed the importance of exercising careful responsibility when addressing the inherent tensions in working with youth. Nonetheless, by encouraging youth to engage with the idea that their experienced inequities are manufactured systems of oppression (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), they can understand how these oppressive structures can be dismantled through action. Through youth-led decision making, students who traditionally are denied agentive roles and relegated to the margins in silence are afforded a voice in determining how they will enhance community well-being. Thus, a participatory design and a community-oriented sense of purpose align with LatCrit and feminist approaches that value the coconstruction of knowledge, reciprocity, and community transformation.

**Resilient Resistance**

As a theoretical construct, resilient resistance emerges within LatCrit frameworks as a dimension of transformational resistance (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Yosso (2000) defined resilient resistance as “surviving and/or succeeding through the educational pipeline as a strategic response to visual microaggressions” (p. 180). It
represents how students survive and triumph despite the “structures of domination” and “in spite of cumulative stress” (Yosso, 2000, p. 181).

As previously noted in the LatCrit and postcolonial literature (Luna, 1998; Valdes, 2005) on the dispossession, silencing, and marginalization of Latinx/Chicanx families and their children, these communities receive false promises perpetuated by the ideology of the American Dream (Yosso, 2000) and are sold a myth of meritocracy that holds education as the key for a successful, comfortable, and fulfilling life of opportunity and security. Moreover, systemic structures and policies grounded in race, class, and linguicism produce an asymmetrical distribution of knowledge and power that prevent advocacy and activism and trickle down to the schooling experiences of bi/multilingual youth. The consequences of these injustices enact daily microaggressions (Pierce, 1970; Solórzano, 1997) upon youth entrenched in standard English ideologies as a function of being labeled, tracked, and tested. Across their many years of schooling, the cumulative injuries from these sustained stresses (Yosso, 2000) erode the internal resources from which bi/multilingual youth draw for their resilience. These resources include self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and social support (Pooley & Cohen, 2010).

For example, school award ceremonies celebrating bi/multilingual students who have passed the English language test, can unintentionally injure ELs who are in attendance and who did not pass. These students may feel left behind in a class and classification characterized by deficits. These well-intentioned ceremonies and certificates are designed to highlight the milestone achievements of bi/multilingual learners who have reclassified to fluent, but they also reify the English language as a
commodity within a larger linguistic hegemony. For those students who did not pass, the certificate represents linguistic property that others have and that they do not.

In these ceremonial recognitions, students are not praised for their exceptional efforts that begin on even ground with dominant non-EL peers, such as making the honor roll. Instead, ceremonies such as these celebrate students who were deemed deficient from the onset. These celebrations mark their attainment of the minimum skills to be considered “proficient” in English. This example illustrates how framing reclassification as an achievement and a marker of ELP is dangerously misleading and creates a false impression in the minds of bi/multilingual learners labeled LTELs. Linguistic meritocracies are perpetuated and reinforced materially to delineate the minimum for being positioned as “normal” in school as a function of mastery or nonmastery of English. Gilded in celebrations of achievement, these language ideologies surface to define those who “know English,” have passed the ELPAC to “graduate,” and are reclassified as English proficient. On the other hand, there are those who do not know English because they did not pass the test, were not recognized in the ceremony, and must simply “sit there” enduring microaggressions of linguistic, emotional, academic, and social exclusion.

**Framing Resistance With Bi/Multilingual Youth**

Yosso (2000) framed resistance as identifying and responding to social inequality. Employing a stance of “proving others wrong,” she defined how agency emerges as a function of different levels of “consciousness, motivation toward social justice, and resistance” (Yosso, 2000, p. 149). Drawing from Freireian models of consciousness for prompting action, Yosso focused on the interstice between naive conformist resistance
and critical transformative resistance. This combination of resistance means that while students are aware of structures of inequality, they shoulder the blame for not succeeding within those structures. For bi/multilingual learners, this is especially important to highlight because their sense of self-efficacy and sense of belonging in schools and society, from which they draw their resilience (Pooley & Cohen, 2010), is potentially shaped by whether or not they pass the ELPAC. The test is also the epicenter from which deficit discourses emanate as additional stresses for youth when educators hold students rather than themselves and the larger system accountable for achievement outcomes.

Thus, Yosso cited Delgado Bernal (1998) to highlight how students are prevented from critiquing structural inequalities and instead conform to the system blaming their families, themselves, and their cultures.

Yosso (2000) conceptualized resistance as iterative and continuous, given the constant negotiation of microaggressions. To distinguish the process of resistance from Freire’s problem-posing method, she outlined four components: (a) question “evidence”; (b) seek information; (c) reflect on newfound “evidence”; and (d) respond to the stereotypes, microaggressions, and inequality. Yosso’s framing differed most from Freire’s in that the latter is a facilitated method, though she clarified the resistance process can occur within the problem-posing method. This is especially significant for hybrid projects like this dissertation, which employed YPAR as a facilitated project, along with community arts projects designed as unfacilitated sense making, expressive undertakings carried out as acts of resistance.

Policy changes take time or may never happen at all, requiring action in the present to “prove others wrong” (Yosso, 2000, p. 149) as a form of resistance. In the
context of this dissertation, it means understanding that reproducing the status quo through ineffective language instruction characterized by competing language ideologies, whether subtractive or additive or other permutations and expecting a different result will not lead to real change in outcomes for bi/multilingual Latinx youth labeled as LTELs. Notably, students’ ability to pass the English language assessments, satisfy the requirements for reclassification to English fluent, and demonstrate mastery of standard English is no panacea for the problem of institutional exclusion. There must be intentional disruption to the way bi/multilingual youth are educated, with specific attention to raising critical awareness about the labeling, tracking, and testing schemes in place. Through dialogic problem-posing methods (Freire, 1970/2020) and an understanding of resistance processes (Yosso, 2000), youth can be positioned to offer counterstories as resistance. Yosso’s scholarship laid the groundwork for amplifying youth voices in resistance postures. By equipping youth with an oppositional vocabulary embedded in a language curriculum and across inquiry, action, and art projects, teacher-researchers and activist scholars can take small actions to promote a movement of resilient resistance.

**Resistance in Latinx/Chicanx Communities**

Central to expressions of resistance in Chicanx/Latinx communities is the collectivism and support with which smaller and larger actions are taken. Within Latina/Chicana feminisms, Trinidad Galván (2006) described a pedagogy of *sobrevivencia* (beyond surviving) among *campesina* (rural women) who draw on individual and collective spiritual purpose not only to survive but to prosper and find joy. These communal proclivities stem from ancestral beliefs in kinship and in the spiritual
for crafting a vision for change and coalescing collective strength for taking action. For example, Sánchez and Hernández (2021) leaned into resistance strategies to negotiate postsecondary spaces. In negotiating their *igualada* status in the academy as “subalterns who seek the same privileges as la patrona but will never receive the same respect” (Sánchez & Hernández, 2021, p. 2), they employed the armor imparted to them by their families in the home and leverage their strategies of resistance beyond individual achievement. The emphasis on collective achievement appears throughout Latina/Chicana scholarship in pedagogies of *sobrevivencia* as the collective pursuit of joy (Trinidad Galván, 2006), *personas educadas* (Rendón, 2011) as community leaders, and *convivencia* (Villenas, 2005) as communal transformation, to name a few. For Sánchez and Hernández (2021), traces of community responsibility emerge as they assert the lessons learned from home and the importance of pulling up other Latinxs/Chicanxs with them—a principle contrary to meritocratic, capitalistic, and individualistic systems in U.S. schooling and higher education. The pedagogies encompassing the rich teaching and learning occurring in Latinx/Chicanx homes and communities can construct new knowledge and theorize critical pedagogies as acts of resilient resistance in schools.

**Conclusion**

As discussed in this chapter, several obstacles impact the success trajectories and schooling experiences of bi/multilingual learners. These include inequities in the system and the classroom, the need to dismantle hegemonic structures in language instruction, eliminate mechanical instruction focused on test-prep pedagogies rooted in standard English, and decenter the teacher as expert by simply allowing students to speak. Across the literature, research on language minority groups operates with a critical lens for
exposing ideological underpinnings in the schooling experiences and achievement patterns across various data, including standardized testing of EL students. Regarding the minoritizing potential of labeling students based on race and language, scholars have employed critical frameworks to reveal the deficit narrative was interchangeable where language, race, and culture were concerned.

Researchers have conducted quantitative studies on ELP test scores comparing EL performance with non-ELs to unmask problems in reclassification procedures and assessment flaws resulting from inconsistent scores (Carroll & Bailey, 2016; Stephenson et al., 2004). These studies, however, have overlooked student voices and reify the problematic notion that data can speak for itself. They highlighted pitfalls in positioning numbers, such as test scores and grades, as independent, static representations of achievement gaps devoid of the human context (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Instead, researchers can aspire toward a more Du Boisian approach to collecting good data “in a manner that allows research participants to provide more in-depth information about the statistics being collected” (Toldson, 2019, p. 8).

As highlighted in this chapter, an abundance of scholarship on naming and theorizing problems with teaching language in traditional ELD classrooms extends across several decades. Studies documenting education interventions rooted in various kinds of pedagogies are replete with recommendations for practitioners and trainers of would-be practitioners. Several scholars have cautioned about failures leading to students becoming LTELs, and others have innovated approaches to language that humanize a traditionally subtractive learning space. These studies contribute to the body of scholarship
challenging the systemic inequities bi/multilingual youth encounter in their schooling by tapping into creative avenues for cultural and linguistic expression.

At the microlevel, research threading Latina/Chicana feminist epistemologies with critical elements drawn from CRT and LatCrit theory can create a space for theorizing transformational pedagogies and creatively materializing them by engaging youth in participatory inquiry. In Chapter 3, I outline a methodology of resilient resistance derived from Latina/Chicana feminisms for centering students as agents of knowledge production. YPAR is critical in nature and complements *pláticas* and Latina/Chicana feminist approaches because it redistributes power and knowledge to those rendered silent from the margins. Collectively, these concepts provide a framework from which to design a space where students’ voices and lived experiences about being labeled, tracked, and tested are centered by asking the following questions:

1. How does an ELD space grounded in a pedagogy of resilient resistance affirm the lived experiences of bi/multilingual youth?

2. What issues/topics do youth express as important to examine about the ELPAC?

3. How can the arts provide bi/multilingual youth a way to engage with and reframe their schooling experiences?
CHAPTER THREE

A METHODOLOGY OF RESILIENT RESISTANCE

In this chapter, I discuss various research approaches and conceptual tools drawn from LatCrit and Latina/Chicana feminisms to inform my qualitative, arts-based, youth participatory action research (YPAR) research study. These coalesce to form what I call a methodology of resilient resistance. This chapter foregrounds the commitments and consequent rationale for the design of this study while highlighting my personal lived experiences and the theoretical perspectives informing the data collection and analytical processes.

I begin by foregrounding resilient resistance as a conceptual tool to frame critical dialogical and arts-based approaches, along with YPAR in a traditional school setting as part of my study design, and curriculum development. Next, I provide my background to contextualize how I came to develop this study, and how I gained access to the school site and the designated English language development (ELD) classroom where this research was conducted. I then describe the youth participants and the use of pláticas (casual conversations) as a pedagogical move seeking to affirm student languages and facilitate meaning making throughout our inquiry-based projects. Here, I provide examples on what a critical dialogical, comics and arts-infused course curriculum might afford for resilient resistance in ELD classrooms. Finally, I detail my data collection methods and discuss how I approached analyzing the data using comics-based tools to inhabit my data in corporeal (Flowers, 2017) and embodied ways.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the success trajectories and schooling experiences of bi/multilingual learners are the result of several inequities. At the macro
level, policies label, test, and track English learners (ELs) enact microaggressions reproduced in classrooms through linguistic hegemonies, assessment-focused standard English instruction, and silencing of bi/multilingual youth. Over time, these stresses erode youth’s sense of self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and sense of social support.

I borrow from the scholarship of Yosso (2000), who coined the notion of resilient resistance as a theoretical framework, and extend this to conceptualize a framework that draws from various innovative and creative research approaches to reimagine language pedagogy and youth agency. I used resilient resistance to ground arts-based educational research, YPAR, and qualitative methods to center student voice and traverse dominant ELD spaces. More so, this framing explicitly creates a taller (workshop space) for youth, humanizing them as coconstructors of knowledge while affirming their languaging practices across pláticas and through the arts.

Resilient resistance is a framework that cultivates a rigorous, language-rich, inquiry-based curriculum positioning both teacher and student as coinvestigators and coconstructors of knowledge. In this participatory research context, meaning making is further extended through visual, literary, and performing arts. Positioning youth to lead in designing a study and an accompanying art project around a language assessment they are expected to take later in the year provides insights about issues that matter most to them. It also highlights what youth seek to understand and how they perceive the education system’s treatment of language and bi/multilingual youth.

Part of working as a teacher in a public school system is the reality of minimal agency over scheduling, designing, and optimizing student learning conditions. Often, ELD classes are perceived as shoestring at best, as evidenced by my years as a bilingual
instructional assistant relegated to the back of a classroom to work in isolation with small groups of ELs. In struggling to forge and claim a space to cultivate and affirm various modes of languaging and knowledge, I drew from my creative artistic intuitions, in concert with resilience strategies, to move through these obstacles and create multimodal and joyful learning experiences for bi/multilingual learners. For example, working as a bilingual instructional assistant at the height of 1990s anti-bilingual education legislation in California, I leveraged my artistic talents to traverse contentious political and classroom microaggressions by creating illustrated teaching materials for my bilingual students. Rather than relying on existing picture cards and models for teaching letter sounds through a white monolingual lens, I invited my group of fifth-grade newcomer EL students to supply relevant words for our sound-symbol picture cards. I then illustrated those words and displayed the cards on our corner pocket chart as custom, cocreated sound cards.

By building on students’ existing knowledge and honoring their contributions through personalized sound cards, students mastered letter sounds swiftly and expanded their language and literacy skills. I highlight this experience because it contextualizes how I moved forward with the jóvenes in this study through several shared experiences of microaggressions. It is also critical for understanding how I not only summoned elements of Latina/Chicana feminisms and art-making but also embodied them as part of my research design and strategy to succeed alongside youth against multiple institutional and systemic barriers.

Figure 2 represents the resilient resistance framework for this study. The paint tubes of primary colors represent dominant ideologies, institutional inequities, and
histories of marginalization entrenched in our education system. The palette represents a malleable taller space where these raw colors are reworked with a pláticas and Latina/Chicana feminisms-infused paintbrush. Alchemizing the primary tube colors into deeper and more complex hues, the brush materializes a pedagogy of resilient resistance, YPAR, and affirming arts practices. Thus, by employing a resilient resistance framework, I confronted subtractive approaches to English language instruction and explored ways to situate myself and my students in a creative space for reimagining curriculum and pedagogy. Moreover, this framework positioned Latinx youth in an active political posture as language policymakers alongside their teachers to reframe how language is perceived and taught. In this context, I explored the overt and subtle sights, sounds, and actions of refusal and rebuttal stemming from the embodied knowledge and experiences of Latinx youth. When engaging in collective critical interrogation of student labels, standard English instruction, and language assessments, I attended to the spoken and unspoken that emanated from the bodies of youth as they surfaced in our ELD space.

Rationale for YPAR and Arts-Based Approaches

For bi/multilingual students, the arts furnish promising opportunities for engaging in multimodal literacies. In her YPAR work with Chicanx/Latinx youth, González Ybarra (2021) highlighted how multimodal literacies can draw out linguistic and cultural identities through testimonio, mural art, and storytelling projects. Recognizing storytelling and art-making as alternative forms of unspoken dialogue, Wager et al. (2017) asserted the benefits of “multiple entry points demanding complex problem-solving skills, but also provide tangible scaffolding for language learning and academic
success” (p. 15). Aligned with YPAR aspirations of positively impacting the community, from process to exhibition, the arts can inspire a greater sense of unity and belonging.

**Figure 2**

*Conceptual Framework of Resilient Resistance*

YPAR flows into a natural conversation with the arts when findings and new understandings are disseminated among the community in didactic multimodal forms. Thus, youth researchers determine what they investigate and how, but they also become youth artists who create embodied manifestations of counterstories. These embodied expressions can be shaped by physical interactions, imbued with intellectual and spiritual meaning making, and different ways of knowing. For example, YPAR projects incorporating photovoice take up storytelling through photographs about a particular phenomenon (Brown & Rodriguez, 2017). As both a qualitative method for inquiry and a
form of multimodal literacy, photovoice affords community participants a platform for highlighting their collective interpretations of the sociopolitical conditions impacting their lives (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Practices such as these activate multiliteracies and position students as designers of their meaning-making processes.

The arts provide a space to probe liminal spaces of situated knowledge and language and draw them out in unrestricted ways that can be historically, culturally, and linguistically affirming and healing. Multimodal approaches position students to confront language labeling and testing issues in ways that embolden them for talking back and casting counternarratives to be shared with the community in expressive modalities. These approaches complement feminist pedagogies of the home when they honor students’ everyday life experiences, including home languages, and legitimize community knowledge (Abril-Gonzalez, 2018; González et al., 2006) as part of the learning. The Chicana feminist principle of reciprocity (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) is reinforced with the added dimension of art as students move through YPAR projects purposefully to imagine how they will express their findings in a community encuentro to educate, perhaps entertain, and affirm themselves as jóvenes educados (dignified youth).

**Infiltrating Dominant ELD Spaces**

Sosa-Provencio (2019) described a culturally specific ethic of care in classrooms where Mexicana educators teach and protect Mexicana/o youth’s culture, language, residency status, intellectual capacity, and promise “below the line of sight” (p. 1139). Centering the testimonios of four Mexicana educators who engage in practices of refusal and reframing to approach the needs and strengths of Mexicana/o students, Sosa-Provencio (2019) theorized a Revolucionista Ethic of Care to offer “new weaponry” to
embolden practitioners who are otherwise “rendered personally and professionally vulnerable in their aims to dismantle oppression” (p. 1139). In my resilient resistance approach, I traversed oppressive structures by “infiltrating” traditional Designated ELD spaces. As a tool, this allowed me to negotiate policy tensions and compliance for gaining access to heavily surveilled and contested spaces and to explore a youth-centered and affirming pedagogical reframing as a form of resistance. For example, developing and implementing a Designated ELD curriculum aligned with ELD standards and frameworks, I made use of the arts, student-driven critical inquiry, and especially pláticas as countervailing forces to mitigate teaching practices that prioritize white middle class linguistic forms. My position within the research site as content and policy expert, professional developer, evaluator, researcher, and as an educator afforded me the rare privilege to freely design learning in ways that move beyond one-dimensional ELD pedagogies that dismiss student strengths and agency. It is a pedagogy of refusal that insists policy compliance does not have to materialize as subtractive, passive, detached learning experiences acted upon students. It also aspires toward a praxis in which language teachers, who are themselves oppressed and forced to conform to language policies that defy their own critical consciousness (Babino & Stewart, 2018) can reimagine their own roles as agentive disruptors in Designated ELD spaces.

**Centering Student Voice as Co-Constructors of Knowledge**

Several scholars (Brooks, 2019; Kibler et al., 2018; Kim & García, 2014; Olsen, 2010) call attention to the reductive ways in which long-term English learners (LTELs) are labeled, characterized, perceived, tracked, and treated both in U.S. secondary schools and in discursive engagements. Even the most critically conscious and well-intentioned
researchers and educators impose and reify their own language ideologies when they make decisions about how LTEL students’ identities should be perceived and constructed. Although some scholarship captures the voices of LTEL students reflecting on their schooling experiences (Brooks, 2016; Castagno, 2008; Fine, 2011; Jacobs, 2008; Kibler et al., 2018; Kim & García, 2014; Mendoza, 2019; Quiroz, 2001), these youth voices are positioned passively to highlight gaps between how students see themselves and how teachers and institutions perceive them. Without the element of student agency and opportunities for youth to also take action against the gaps, the findings in these studies serve for the mere benefit of practitioners and policymakers who may or may not take up reform, signaling a need for clarity on what student voice means and the difference between capturing student voices to narrate a phenomenon and elevating student voices as policymakers for action and as co-constructors of knowledge. Student voice is “the sound of students speaking not only with those students experiencing meaningful, acknowledged presence, but also with their having the power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices in schools” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363) while affording students opportunities to “speak and act alongside credentialed educators as critics and creators of educational practice” (Cook-Sather, 2018, p. 17).

Jóvenes educados must be permitted to assert their own linguistic identity and preference, their academic aspirations, and their convictions on how they feel they should be situated in a schooling system fraught with barriers. In democratizing the language classroom through informal talk with young people, my study endeavored to redistribute power among teachers and locate jóvenes educados as critically conscious experts on their own lives. In a space of language instruction this redistribution of power begins with
specific actions taken by the teacher to first, relinquish power as the adult figure of authority that surveils how youth produce language to enforce rigid standard English curriculum and test-prep pedagogies and secondly, to include youth in driving and designing the learning. I set out to do this using informal pláticas (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) that allowed movement through various modes of communication for conveying meaning making, which I explain in greater detail, and with a living curriculum that, although broadly framed out, was continuously shaped by the jóvenes in pedagogical partnership. Cook-Sather et al. (2021) defined pedagogical partnerships as respectful, reciprocal processes where teaching and learning are treated as shared responsibilities. I argue positioning students as policymakers across the curriculum and throughout the teaching and learning process is critical to achieving transformational outcomes.

Inviting and Affirming Diverse Languaging Practices

By developing and deploying a curriculum anchored in dialogic exercises, the arts, and youth-driven inquiry around the gatekeeping language assessment, this study took up the challenge of (re)imagining and enacting language pedagogies that aspire to liberatory outcomes for students labeled LTELs. The arts-infused curriculum and pedagogical moves summoned all forms of communication, especially concerning knowing with the senses. These moves included daily activities that tapped into visual, auditory, spoken, physical, and gustatory modes of communication. A multisensory approach provided youth participants access to abstract ideas about identity, language(s), and new vocabularies to prepare them for designing action research projects stemming from these complex issues. From theater exercises to visual expression, sound-related
expression, food preparation and tasting experiences, 3-D installations, technology-enabled expression, and reflective poetry, youth participants were afforded an extensive creative repertoire for communicating their voices. From these options, they were granted agency in choosing their preferred modality for constructing meaning, naming, and dialoguing.

My approach acknowledged that although the youth participants in this group were identified as ELs with Spanish as their home language on record, their relationships to the Spanish language and Latinx culture are complex, intersectional, and unfixed. Thus, I resisted reductive portraits of LTEL youth as a monolith by integrating Spanish throughout the curriculum and instructional time in unstructured and casual ways alongside English counterparts. Furthermore, I invited multilingual expressions, songs, memories, tensions, and other epistemological threads to center the jóvenes’ starting point of engagement with new words, ideas, and curricular concepts. More details about the arts-infused ELD and YPAR curriculum are outlined in the research design section.

**My Background and Positionality**

Bringing Latina/Chicana feminist epistemology into conversation with Corbin and Strauss’s (1990) concept of theoretical sensitivity, Delgado Bernal (1998) asserted personal experience and professional experience as sources from which Latina/Chicana researchers can draw cultural intuition. In this section, I provide vignettes from my life that undergird how I come to this work as an activist-scholar committed to humanizing the experiences of bi/multilingual youth. I invoke Elenes’s (2006) call to reclaim student voices not by way of recovery using the colonial and hegemonic tools of analysis, but by deliberately changing the methodological tools used to reclaim those voices (Calderón et
The use of pláticas is a decolonial move toward that reclamation and a natural conduit to pedagogies of care that draw from knowledge imparted in students’ homes beyond school walls. Collectively, these moves work together to reframe youth as dignified young people, as in Rendón’s (2011) concept of personas educadas, rather than with deficit labels such as LTELs.

The following vignettes touch upon my lived experiences that informed the design and the methodological choices I made and the relational considerations in working with jóvenes educados. I begin by describing my Mexican and Argentinian lineage grounded in service, activism, and art. I then discuss how pláticas are embedded in my cultural and epistemological ways of being and knowing.

My Lineage

Born in Baja California, Mexico, I experienced a transborder childhood shuttling between the modest suburbs of Los Angeles and the frenetic sights, sounds, and smells of Tijuana. I was fortunate to grow up close to my maternal Mexican family in Tijuana and my paternal Argentinian family in Los Angeles. As the product of strong, talented, and ethnocentric parents I benefited from generational privilege embodied in culturally affirming pedagogies of resilience stemming from the home. Notions of service and social justice also course through my lineage. Exiled from Argentina during the 1950s, my father and Abuelo traveled throughout Latin America using their artistic talent to bring awareness to social injustices. I received and internalized these storied histories of artmaking for a greater purpose throughout my childhood. Across both families I was taught there was nobility in being an artist and an educated activist that far outweighed
capitalistic endeavors. As part of my cultural intuition, my ancestral histories inform how I “do” social justice work through art and how I imagine without boundaries.

Máscaras y Lenguas Torcidas

Though Spanish was my first language and was carefully surveilled and nurtured at the insistence of both sides of my family, I experienced and continue to experience insider/outsider tensions in reconciling my place and privilege in this country as well as within my Latina identity, especially linguistically. I take refuge behind masks (Montoya, 1994) from a vast inventory I carefully select in similar ways to how I choose my linguistic repertoire for a given occasion. For example, I can harness my academic and melodic Spanish when I communicate with my Abuelo to identify as Argentinian. I employ my Borderland Spanish when I want to move among my fellow Tijuanenses, and I make use of my varying intensities of Spanish-English concentrations whenever I want to blur identity or linguistic commitments. This idea of repertoire informs my praxis in approaching language with an unruly pluralism. There was a time, however, when I became aware of my Spanish slipping away. I remember being 10 years old and struggling to pronounce pá/ja/ro, which means bird in English. Somehow, my mouth could not untangle itself from incorrectly saying pá/ra/jo. I practiced relentlessly to untangle my tongue, and to this day, each time I use that word, I remember how it had once harrowed me.

To recover and grow my academic Spanish, my mother enrolled me in a summer campamento (camp) in one of the most elite private schools in Tijuana. This life-altering decision was the first time I remember being unmasked (Montoya, 1994) by others for being an inauthentic Mexicana and positioned as a subaltern and a “pocha,” a pejorative
term for someone who speaks Spanish poorly. It was also the first time I understood the power of language as capital and how it felt not to have it. I resolved to prove them wrong by tenaciously fortifying my Spanish, polishing my accent, and demonstrating I could exist authentically in two worlds wielding both Spanish and English proficiently. As a child, I could not nor was I permitted to imagine an alternative existence where linguistic binaries were relaxed. It was not acceptable to translanguage in my familial and social circles. My only option was to be bullied into a native-like Spanish proficiency that brings the perpetual insecurity of never being quite good enough. I clung to these lessons in my mothering practices and with my students to protect them from being bullied by the same treachery of language.

**My Art y Mi Taller**

Before I attended art school, my father was my first teacher, and though he eventually went on to college to become a law enforcement officer, he was a sign painter, commercial artist, and muralist first. There were no computers in those days, and everything had to be hand-painted in his taller, which was his workshop in the garage. When I conceptualize the taller for this study, it is this workshop I hold in my mind where I have fond memories of experimenting, creating, and even getting hurt by tools I was not supposed to be handling. My father’s taller was stocked with well-worn tools I wielded enthusiastically with rascuache (Mendoza Aviña, 2016) skill to materialize the art projects in my head. Nothing seemed impossible–challenges need only be addressed with trial-and-error tenacity. Similarly, the taller in this study was a place of possibility, imagination, and problem-solving rigor. In dreaming up large-scale inquiry, action, and
art projects, the jóvenes and I collectively revised and reworked several blueprints to arrive at gratifying solutions.

A quintessential component of my development as an artist was my sketchbook. I began my first sketchbook at age 6 when my Nana bought me my first cuaderno notebook at the Calimax supermarket one summer in Tijuana. Since then, I have amassed and archived several art journals that functioned to sharpen my drawing skills or satiate my need to “draw out” my joy, anger, infatuations, sadness, and anything else commanding expression. My journals nourish me in times of hardship while also documenting my growth from childhood to adulthood. The pages can make me smile or cringe as I revisit the moments that compelled me to sketch. They are tender visual memoirs of a life lived in art and testaments of strength and resilience. Above all, my art journals serve as powerful conceptualizing tools for making sense of complex ideas and emotions. For this study, I made use of digital art journals to sketch important moments and work through emotionally charged moments with the jóvenes. I will elaborate more about these digital sketches in the data collection and analysis section.

El Cafecito

Before arriving in academia and engaging with seminal texts on pláticas as methodological sites of theory, I only knew of cafecitos. My Nana started a vacation tradition when I was 6 or 7 years old of waking me daily by whispering in my ear, “¿Vamos por el cafecito con tu Tía Ester?” We made the 10-minute drive through the potholed streets of Tijuana until arriving at my tía’s house. It always smelled of cigarettes since my uncle and all five of his children smoked inside their modest two-bedroom home and there was always café con leche and pan dulce stacked in a communal bowl on
the kitchen table. There, I listened to my Nana and her sister’s chismes about family, savoring the unfiltered details of cousins in trouble, nephews and nieces in and out of love, money follies, and plans to venture to el otro lado, which meant we would be crossing the border to go shopping in San Diego. Some days we would visit with more of my five tíos and I was often the only child in the room. As daughters of one of the earliest business leaders of Tijuana, my Nana and her sisters were strong, opinionated women who were raised in great privilege, but they gave up their lavish comforts to marry for love. During cafecitos with my Nana and tíos, I learned of my great grandparents’ histories, fortune, and loss through their storytelling. I also received advice ranging from dieting consejos, marriage consejos, money consejos, and consejos about always holding on to my Spanish language. Every winter, summer, and spring vacation this was how my mornings and early afternoons were spent as I took my place in our family’s didactic oral tradition of receiving generational histories that affirmed our cultural identities, core values, and reinforced the need to preserve my Spanish language. This is how I came to understand my education began long before I entered U.S. schools.

Pláticas

Delgado Bernal (1998) asserted professional experience can inform the way in which people come to understand and analyze research data, insider familiarity with participants, and knowledge of the field. In my professional practice, pláticas were how I connected with my students, their families, and school community members. My work as a practitioner in K–12 classrooms focused on the primacy of talking with students to build a community of care, affirm knowledge from lived experiences and the home, and build schema to access content. My interactions with students opened with a daily ritual
of personally welcoming students at the door, often as I sang songs to them to initiate conversation. As they smiled sheepishly at me or made a clever remark about my 1980s soft rock song choice, I hoped to communicate to each student that they were seen, that they were welcomed in this learning space, and that they mattered. From jokes to chisme about family, girlfriend/boyfriend/no friend updates, teacher complaints, to sudden tearful breakdowns about something more serious, these seconds-long interactions affirmed students. They communicated that everything they brought with them mattered at the door and during our class time together. Informal conversations were the safe and familiar starting points that primed us for breaking down emotional walls and content, language, and literacy walls.

Latina/Chicana scholars have employed pláticas to center participants’ voices as thoughtful meaning-makers and for theorizing (Flores Carmona et al., 2021; Guzmán, 2012; Sánchez & Hernández, 2021). Like pláticas, Zanoni (2008) described “charlas” as informal conversational dialogues within Latina/o cultural practices that engineer epistemology, identity, and agency. As a fundamental practice in the home, pláticas are one of the first ways language and social interaction are constructed in Latinx families. As a sociocultural language practice (Zanoni, 2008), charlas and pláticas can foster democratic social relations (Mayo, 1999) for meaning making and eliciting critical consciousness about hegemonic power structures. Thus, pláticas were appropriate for this study to flatten hierarchical power structures and reinforce mutuality (Valle, 1982) in coconstructing knowledge through participatory research.

In employing pláticas to center youth voices in Designated ELD classrooms, I set out to first build relationships with students to dismantle the strict language separation
that occurs in this school’s classrooms as a function of the dual language program structure and in ELD settings overall. To achieve this and guide my efforts, I summoned the wisdom of early 20th century Belgian surrealist René Magritte, a painter who has been seminal to my artistic repertoire and whom I first discovered when I was 5 years old from among my father’s collection of artbooks.

Although I could not name nor fully understand the visual absurdities and contradictions in the human conditions Magritte painted, my juvenile sensibilities registered the resistance in his images as a critique of boundaries and absolutes. Especially gripping was his blurring of binaries that melted together in unnatural and unsettling ways on the canvas—indoor/outdoor; object/human; and especially text/object. To reveal a dissonance in linguistic and pictorial systems of representation, Magritte painted a series of pictures where objects are labeled in a manner that does not correctly identify the object. Magritte’s oeuvre visually models how “logic could be used to break the tyranny of words and reveal the confusions which originate in the very forms of our language” (Gablik, 1976, p. 127). For my work, this kind of slippery ideation and recalcitrance is useful in a space of language as I illustrate in the digital painting I created. I call Figure 3 The Use of Language, a play on Magritte’s painting titled The Use of Words I (L’usage de la parole I), to depict how languages are hegemonically situated and how in a space of pláticas, the hard binaries become amorphous. More about how this image was used in the classroom and the role of pláticas in the curriculum will be addressed in the design section that follows.
Figure 3

The Use of Language Digital Illustration

The Community

Jóvenes Educados

This section provides background information about the youth participants. I begin with statistical data about their ages, languages listed on home language surveys, and English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC) achievement scores to problematize the opaque nature of this information in eclipsing the talents, knowledge, and intellect of these jóvenes. In alignment with my commitments to foreground and elevate the voices of youth as experts on their own lives, I refrain from attempting to provide brief narratives about each participant. Instead, I respectfully defer to the intimate poetic art they generated for telling who they are in their own words and on their own terms. Located in Chapter 6, these powerful and tender poetic expressions starkly counter statistical data to humanize these youth as dignified jóvenes educados.
The *jóvenes* included 20 youth in the seventh grade, all classified as ELs. Eighteen were classified as LTELs, and two were classified as newcomers. During the second phase, one newcomer *joven* returned to Mexico, and another *joven* transferred to a neighboring school district toward the end of our project. Upon enrolling in U.S. schools, all youth were tested and labeled ELs after a Home Language Survey was administered and returned that identified Spanish as the language spoken in the home. Most of these youth had been in this school for over 6 years. Their overall English proficiency scores as measured by the ELPAC were 2s and 3s. The ELPAC measures English proficiency on a scale of 1–4, where “all students with an ELPAC Overall PL 4 are eligible to be considered for reclassification in conjunction with other locally determined criteria” (California EC § 313 and 5 CCR § 11303). An overall score of 4 allows students to move through the subsequent stages for consideration as English proficient. These stages include but are not limited to teacher evaluations, parent consultations, and additional data from assessments such as the Smarter Balanced assessment, district benchmark assessments, or an assessment of basic skills in English. For this study, youth are framed as *jóvenes educados* to humanize and honor participants, and pseudonyms of their choosing are used to refer to specific individuals.

**Research Design**

The qualitative design for this study reflects my commitments to the agency of youth and the power of student voice as amplified through the arts. In the following section, I detail how I gained access to teach a daily Designated ELD course in a traditional school setting. I then provide broad descriptions of the course curriculum and situate the *taller* as a transitional space moving in three phases across the research.
Cultivating Relationships

With a leadership team highly committed to the success of their students, teachers, and community, this charter school site and TK–8 network stood out among the many charter and public schools I have supported in the past. I credit the leadership, teachers, and students for nourishing my creativity in (re)imaging how language cultivation can occur under the most restrictive pandemic-imposed learning conditions. When most schools were retreating from academic pursuits to focus solely on the social-emotional, this network, henceforth pseudo-named Justice Prep Academy (JPA), scaled up its efforts to address both fronts. The leadership understood their 379 predominantly Spanish-speaking TK–8 ELs could not afford to lose a single instructional opportunity.

My journey with the JPA to build systems, implement workshops, and conduct classroom walk-throughs and evaluations alongside the leadership revealed a school-wide willingness to learn and do whatever is necessary to support teachers in setting up multilingual students for success, even during COVID-induced restrictions. Notably, gaining insider access to the JPA’s community and leadership circles was difficult. This community has successfully built a protective and nurturing fortress to lovingly hold its students, teachers, and families, which can only be penetrated with trust. I spent 2 years working with JPA, building relationships with teachers and administrators to grow capacity in addressing the needs of their bi/multilingual learners. The leadership team observed how teachers responded to my reframing of how language and literacy were planned, taught, and assessed. Drawing from an asset-based theory of action to emphasize how community strengths can be leveraged to fortify teaching and learning, my professional development approach resists hierarchies that position me as an expert
and participants as passive recipients. At JPA, I did this by celebrating the privilege of having a fully bilingual Spanish-English teaching staff and encouraging teachers to use their Spanish language repertoire in Designated ELD spaces to promote cross-linguistic transfer.

I built rapport with the JPA community during COVID-19 lockdowns and worked closely with leadership to conceive a systematic approach for addressing the needs of bi/multilingual learners. By encouraging personal and informal communications to invite questions, ideas, and risk taking, I invited stakeholders to reach out to me directly for support. I also made use of pláticas for interacting with staff as a critical component for establishing a culture of collegiality, as well as for creative and intellectual reciprocity. From pedagogy to technology, the numerous text messages, informal emails, and phone calls from the leadership team outside of traditional working hours as well as on weekends signaled their comfort, trust, and willingness to be vulnerable in requesting feedback on a lesson or to ascertain a quick answer to an ELD-related question.

(Re)imagining in Times of Pandemia

JPA’s immense care and commitment to its students and families triggered my creative proclivities to do more to help. During COVID-19 lockdowns, I was inspired to create something that could connect teachers to their middle school students whom I knew were going to be the last group to be transitioned into in-person learning and whose spotty access to synchronous learning opportunities for speaking were problematic. Using art and technology, I consequently developed a digital tool to formatively assess speaking and writing and pitched it to the middle school principal to see if this could help connect JPA’s adolescent learners more closely with their teachers. We piloted the digital tool
with the network’s 47 eighth-grade ELs and teachers listened to their students engage
with an image asynchronously in ways even their prepandemic classrooms would not
allow. Students would know their teacher would be listening to them and providing
feedback through written notes or voice-recorded correspondence.

During professional learning sessions with teachers, we listened to student
recordings to calibrate and focus on detecting and leveraging students’ strengths for
continuous growth. Teachers grew emotional as they listened to the intimate background
sounds within their students’ homes. They could hear adults speaking to one another and
small children trying to get the attention of their older siblings as they tried to focus on
recording their responses. Teachers listened to their students struggling to summon words
they needed in crescendos and decrescendos of confidence. They were humbled by the
disclaimers their students recorded before beginning the task, sharing how they were
feeling and how they would try hard to do well. I also listened to the powerful voices of
youth who wanted to make their teachers proud. I tuned into their rich thinking and the
clever humor they infused into their image descriptions. I especially listened to the caring
sounds of loving parents trying to remain anonymous as they whispered hints to help
their children. One week later, the network’s leadership indicated they wanted to deploy
the digital tool with all TK–2 students and all Grade 3–8 EL students. Through these
interactions, I developed a deep connection with the young people in this community and
listened to each of the approximately 500 recordings.

As COVID-19 restrictions waned and my relationship with teachers and the
principles expanded, I was physically welcomed into the school to support the network’s
language needs and provide planning and curricular support to middle school teachers in
the areas of science and social studies. I summoned my experience in leading curriculum
design workshops for New York City’s Department of Education to respond to middle
school teachers’ needs in this community. The principal attended the first few sessions to
observe, ask questions, and evaluate our planning sessions’ efficacy. Satisfied with how
she and the teachers found them helpful, the principal understood the unique demands of
a language-rich and rigorous science and social studies curriculum, particularly for
teachers working with bi/multilingual learners. As we set long-term planning goals for
the following year, more planning sessions were scheduled, and the principal entrusted us
to move forward without her. During the conversations during our planning sessions, I
learned more about this community’s students and their strengths, quirks, and challenges.

**Designing the Taller**

In Spanish, *taller* means a workshop or artist studio. The *taller* is a space of rigor
that implores the mind and body to engage in deep problem-solving amid tensions,
frustrations, trials, and errors. I define *taller* as a workshop space of creative possibility
for engaging in abstract and concrete imagining and dreaming, meaning making, and
repurposing the material and the conceptual. It is also a place of discovery and
affirmation where the artist’s total self works together to actualize new ideas and rework
old ones. The *taller* can be a permanent or itinerant space that materializes wherever the
creator decides to engage in their work. Throughout this study, the *taller* encompassed
the dynamic, nurturing, renegade, and participatory space for (re)imagining, reframing,
and engaging *jóvenes educados* in their situated knowledge. In this space, *jóvenes*
brought rich linguistic and cultural histories, expertise from lived experiences within
structures of learning and assessment, and their creative voices as artists and community educators.

**Securing Access to Build a Taller**

I approached the middle school principal casually at the beginning of our second year together and mentioned the idea of an after-school enrichment class that would take the form of a youth research and art project. I initially framed the project as a move to demystify and interrogate the English language assessment students would take in the spring. My prior work at another Southern California school yielded marked improvements in ELPAC achievement and student reclassification after engaging in critical test examinations. The proposal was well received by the principal, who noted this kind of project would align with their network-wide initiative to promote inquiry-based learning. After crafting the broad strokes for this study, I met with the principal again in the spring to detail my project idea.

In framing this study, I considered important lessons from scholars and practitioners working with youth outside of school and the documented challenges of participant retention due to factors impacting Latinx communities, such as family obligations. I asked the principal if she might consider entertaining this work as an embedded part of the middle school’s daily designated ELD block in response to these challenges. I mentioned this arts-infused YPAR approach might be a worthwhile change to the usual test-prep exercises that currently occur. I added that this work could potentially increase opportunities for student discourse and address the school’s science and social studies goals to strengthen data and reasoning skills, and deeper meaning-making for transformational outcomes. I also cited a recent study (Buenrostro &
Maxwell-Jolly, 2021) showing promising returns when ELD was taught in meaningful, project-based contexts. The principal expressed her gratitude for being considered for this project. She embraced the idea wholeheartedly by inviting me to teach the daily designated ELD class with rising seventh graders in the 2022–2023 school year.

In the spirit of researcher reciprocity that resists extractivist methodologies, I explained I would volunteer my time to teach outside of my consultant duties and create the school’s curriculum. I also invited teachers across TK–8 to participate, interact, or observe our work. The principal expressed her excitement at the idea and mentioned she could arrange for teachers to be released from their classrooms to allow them to observe. As we discussed the details of how permission would be obtained from students and parents, I embraced her proposal to host a parent night to explain the details of the project, obtain permission, and clarify ways parents might support students from home.

**Remaining Resilient**

Initially, the principal and I discussed how I would meet with students in a self-contained classroom for 40 minutes on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays and 45 minutes on Wednesdays. At a later meeting, the principal disclosed several new plans, including restructuring leadership and consolidating the middle school with the elementary school. In addition to construction plans to modernize the school that limited available classroom space, adding a science class to the middle school curriculum required a significant overhaul to the daily schedule, consequently placing Designated ELD time at risk. Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations [CCR] Section 11300[a] defines Designated ELD as “instruction provided during a protected time in the regular school day for focused instructions on the state-adopted ELD standards” for students.
identified as ELs. It was unclear how the new schedule would accommodate Designated ELD time, either as a daily standalone period or as an interwoven component within a core content class. This problem was more pronounced at the middle school level, where Designated ELD was relegated to the end of the school day when electives were also offered, and in some cases, competed and gained priority over ELD.

Two weeks prior to the start of the school year, I learned the campus renovation project rendered several classrooms unavailable. Teachers would have to double up, and every classroom would always be in use. More importantly, a protected time of daily ELD instruction for middle school ELs would not be offered. Instead, ELD became supplemental to a larger integrated mainstream Study Skills class occurring only on Wednesdays for 45 minutes and Thursdays for 40 minutes. Consequently, during the 19-week semester, I met with the jóvenes twice a week. On Wednesdays, we met in small groups of 6-8 students across three separate class periods, then on Thursdays, we came together whole group for one session. I also held three after-school and six lunchtime sessions for students wishing to continue working on their inquiry and art projects.

**Designated ELD Course Design**

Throughout my doctoral coursework, I endeavored to theorize new ways for restructuring and redirecting the language development pipeline for bi/multilingual learners, particularly long-term ELs. Buenrostro and Maxwell-Jolly (2021) presented a case study of a northern California school district that blended career and technical education (CTE) and ELD successfully to increase EL participation in career pathway courses. The synergistic commitments of ELD and CTE teachers to deliver language development and coding/programming instruction for computer science pathways were
well-received by eighth-grade students and proved advantageous for offering them
greater returns through transferable skills and credit-yielding coursework. In response to
this promising approach, I envisioned an extension of this work that weaves high-impact
language instruction with creative, meaningful, and transformational possibilities.

Working within a resilient resistance framework means enacting defiant moves as
the structures of oppression remain intact (Yosso, 2000). This necessitates a curriculum
that satisfies policy requirements for mandated ELD instruction as outlined in
California’s ELD framework and multilingual learner roadmap while centering elements
within those policies as content for meaning making and student-driven inquiry. The
course curriculum map (see Appendix B) developed for this project identified broad
learning goals for each unit. The featured topics comprised identity, language and culture,
conducting research, and making art. Additional curricular components included guiding
questions, a brief description of activities, language goals, and a list of ELD domains
aligned with each unit. Incorporating The Use of Language image (see Figure 3), shown
in the previous section, as an enlarged poster and backdrop for our work allowed us to
move through policy provisions within the curriculum with a critically conscious lens.
The poster as a living tool evolved with youth as they began to locate the dimensions of
our work on the poster, specifically for critical conversations around linguistic
hierarchies. For example, as we began to discuss assessment-related terminology, the
jóvenes negotiated how to metaphorically situate the academic English register demanded
by the test within the picture.

The curriculum and content for this class were designed to be relevant to students’
lived experiences as ELs. Central to the curriculum were embedded spaces where
meaningful conversations could occur for inviting students to be vulnerable in sharing their joy, frustrations, anxieties, and pain without judgment or surveillance. For example, in a case study examining the experiences of a LTEL and his mother, authored by language scholar, Brooks (2019), the jóvenes expressed their frustrations about their own testing and tracking experiences. More importantly, this space permitted them to harness their embodied knowledge to forge a collective resistance and response against endured microaggressions about being labeled, tested, and tracked.

To increase access to scholarly literature, texts were chunked into smaller pieces and presented in various multimodal ways including cartoons, shortened excerpts, and read-alouds. Vocabulary and schema-building exercises and reading comprehension strategies were strategically designed to scaffold understanding. For example, as we prepared to engage in a mini literature review to provide context for our research questions, the jóvenes were guided through a literature prediction exercise. The literature they read consisted of excerpts from several scholars (Blanton, 2000; Carroll & Bailey, 2016; Toldson, 2019; Wolf et al., 2010) discussed in my Chapter 2 literature review. The complexity of texts was substantial, mainly because most students’ reading levels were 2–4 levels below seventh grade. Thus, investing time in building schema through explicit vocabulary frontloading was vital to students being able to access the text. Moreover, because the four selected texts highlighted critical issues of score validity, bias in test design, erroneous high-stakes decisions, and histories of racist testing practices on Mexican Americans, students’ critical consciousness hinged on their ability to comprehend these texts. Consequently, we spent one class session defining, discussing, contextualizing, and categorizing words into various groups as a prereading strategy. This
approach to vocabulary highlighted the relevancy of these words to the jóvenes and helped them understand how they had been labeled and tracked. It also encouraged the jóvenes to operationalize these words for actively naming and describing the embodied experiences endured throughout their schooling.

**Arts-Infused YPAR (YPARt) Curriculum**

Centering student voices and situating youth at the forefront of their learning as agentive, intellectual, and critically consciousformulates a praxis that embodies various processes of resistance. From Yosso’s (2000) process of resistance to Freire’s (1970/2020) problem-posing method, the hallmark of this work is dialogic and requires youth to engage as “critical coinvestigators in dialogue with the teacher” (p. 81). Within this reframed relationship between the teacher-researcher-student and the students-teachers (Freire, 1970/2020), this work’s cognitive and linguistic demands transcend vertical teacher-student orientations and mechanical and test-driven pedagogies that characterize Designated ELD classrooms. Employing a YPAR design, the inquiry-based curriculum replaced dull and subtractive test-prep approaches by allowing students to exhibit agency in determining the issues that matter most to them regarding their positioning in schools and the subsequent language assessments they must take. Students also determined who should be addressed in the research, how to conduct their investigation, and the research tools for capturing data.

The curriculum further allowed students to determine the mode of expression for presenting their findings. With an arts-integrated component, youth were encouraged to apply their knowledge and agency in purposeful discourse to negotiate methods of expressive production not typically afforded in traditional learning models, especially in
Appendix B showcases several arts-based activities and theater exercises developed for each unit to invite oral language practice, creativity, critical thinking, and play. By integrating elements of theater, for example, youth participants were afforded opportunities “to try things out in an existential and metaphoric world that is different because we are making it as it makes us” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2020, p. 11). Positioned as experts, researcher-educators, and artists, they shared their knowledge in various creative expressions, including paintings, poetry, and illustrated pages of consejos to be shared with the community.

As we transitioned from building community in phase one to developing a research scheme for interrogating the language policies and assessment in phase two, we arrived at more significant understandings. In the third and final phase, the jóvenes conceptualized art projects to express their comprehensive meaning-making. They considered their research questions from their inquiry projects and theorized from their findings and their bodies (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2022) to generate large-scale paintings.

Youth participants also created annotated sketches of ideas in notebooks and on the classroom boards to document and promote meaning making, conceptualizing, reflection, and theorizing processes. They presented their ideas in class to cofashion painting compositions. Le Jevic and Springgay (2008) argued, “Through image and text, students (as artists, researchers, and teachers) engage in knowledge production that is manifested in their bodies as a web of entangled understandings that arise from visual, tactile, and sensory experiences” (p. 86).

The use of art projects such as poetry and other expressive assignments brings our work into conversation with Latina/Chicana feminist notions of corporeal knowledge. It
also resists reductive binaries of right or wrong by widening creative thought spaces in search of omissions and ethical negotiations of difference (Le Jevic & Springgay, 2008). I argue this latitude is paramount in complex spaces where language and identity are being negotiated. By allowing youth to “assemble the frameworks of understandings rather than having teachers give them rigid rubrics and set expectations” (Le Jevic & Springgay, 2008, p. 85), art projects become another tool for mitigating power structures between researcher/teacher and researcher/student. Specific assignments in class prompted youth to consider how they could apply their new knowledge and privilege as experts on language assessments and ELD issues to help other bi/multilingual youth. In composing a page of advice, each of the jóvenes reflected on their understandings to offer consejos, or advice, that can help others navigate similar issues. These consejos pages also helped to scaffold thinking around how jóvenes could transmit their research findings through the arts for the final presentation and community encuentro.

**Data Collection**

This section outlines the three phases of data collection. I also address how the methods for collecting data align with the methodological, pedagogical, and theoretical underpinnings for this dissertation that center student voices in talking back about their lived experiences.

Data collection was conducted twice a week, Wednesdays and Thursdays, as part of a 40- to 45-minute embedded ELD instructional block within the school day beginning August 15, 2022, through February 17, 2023. Three phases are defined for data collection: the taller construction phase, the taller as a space of inquiry, and the taller as a maker space of action and reflection (see Figure 4). Across all phases, data collection
included audio-recorded class sessions, in situ sketching/journaling, and field notes to supplement the audio recordings. The process charts and class assignments where the youth participants and I archived our meaning making about the various topics addressed in class provided additional data. I obtained consent from youth before including their work in this project.

Figure 4

*Page From Student Syllabus Explaining Three Phases of Study*

My digital sketchbook and paper-pencil researcher journal contained important data points collected during class and visual memoing in the form of sequential art in comic format. Each class session yielded one sketch based on audio recordings, field notes, and rough in situ sketches that synthesized a moment or collection of moments within a session. Three class sessions on Wednesday yielded three sketches, and one
whole-group session on Thursday yielded one sketch for a total of four sketches per week. Each sketch emerged as a single comic strip page to serve as an analytic memo later shared with the jóvenes at our following class session for participatory coding exercises. Memos are key for documenting researcher thoughts, ideas, tensions, and insights (Charmaz, 2006).

As described in the following section, my art training and professional experience with comics and graphic novels as pedagogical and analytical tools informed my decision to employ a comics-based platform. I highlight how comics afforded me a less constrained mode for capturing raw data based on what I observed, heard, and sensed without filtering through cumbersome text-based decisions about style and diction. Kuttner et al. (2017) explained comics are most useful early in the data collection and brainstorming process as field notes, for transcribing interviews, to explore emerging ideas similar to mind maps and memos, and as a form of participatory meaning making. I used an automated transcription and voice recording software application for memos to supplement my sketches. Additionally, I captured my impressions immediately following our class sessions and driving across town to pick up my daughter from school. More detailed descriptions of data points are outlined next, specific to each project phase.

**Phase 1: Constructing the Taller**

In this phase, the focus was on building community and understanding identity as a collective and as individuals. The data consisted of audio recordings from our class sessions, audio-recorded field dictations, and weekly comics that captured key moments from our pláticas and interactions. *The Use of Language* poster (see Figure 3) and youth-
created labels and Post-It notes also served as continuous data points to reveal how students positioned language-related topics throughout the course.

I refrained from formally interviewing youth because our daily interactions and focus group provided sufficient data. Conducting one-on-one interviews between the researcher and students may be perceived as uncomfortable by some youth. My intention was not to make the jóvenes feel they were the objects of a study but rather co-constructors of inquiry schemes and knowledge alongside the researcher/facilitator, in line with transformational pedagogy.

**Phase 2: The Taller for Inquiry**

In this phase, the taller metamorphosed into a site of interrogation, inquiry, and deeper meaning-making around the Home Language Survey, the ELPAC, and assessment data reports. Youth participants merged their knowledge and expertise from their multiyear experiences taking the assessment with new research terminology and concepts. The data consisted of recordings of pláticas, process charts, and student work samples as “social products” reflecting and embodying who we are (Saldaña, 2021). Instruments students designed for conducting their research, such as recruitment for participation letters, surveys, interview recordings, and electronic correspondences with stakeholders that emerged from the YPAR coursework, also comprised the data. Finally, data analysis process charts and annotated documents showcasing codes and claims generated by youth researchers furnished additional data.

**Phase 3: The Taller for Creating and Reflecting**

In the final phase, the taller shifted into a space of action, application, creation, and reflection. As students synthesized their findings from YPAR projects, they made
important decisions about transmitting these insights to the community in a school-wide *encuentro*. Data included sketches, notes, and recorded student interactions capturing conceptualization processes and student decision making for public dissemination of findings. Data also included poems, illustrated pages of *consejos* (advice), and painting projects students created for the community *encuentro* in Spring 2023. Table 1 presents data sources used to address research questions across the three phases.

**Table 1**

*Research Questions and Phases of Data Collection*

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<tr>
<th>Phase 1: Constructing the <em>Taller</em></th>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
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<td>How does an ELD space focused on resilient resistance affirm the lived experiences of bi/multilingual youth?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• <em>Use of Language</em> poster annotations</td>
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<td>• process charts</td>
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<td>• class assignments</td>
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<td>Researcher data</td>
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<td>• sketches/fieldnotes in art research journal</td>
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<td>• audio memos</td>
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<td>• cartooned memos</td>
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<td>• lesson plans</td>
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<tr>
<th>Phase 2: The <em>Taller</em> for Inquiry</th>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
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<td></td>
<td>What issues/topics do students express as important to examine about the ELPAC?</td>
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<td>• cartooned memos</td>
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### Analysis

Working within qualitative methods that coalesce youth agency and the arts as a platform for exploring expressive countermoves, I summoned my cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as an artist and merged it with that of a researcher functioning as a messenger. In describing this dual role, Galman (2009) defined the role of artists who “develop the contours of their craft, creatively designing and implementing inquiry models and framing their own interpretive ‘story’” (p. 197) and as messengers who “simultaneously audit their subjectivity and attend to participant stories and experiences” (p. 197). In first analyzing the data and then communicating the findings, my approach to analysis aligned with creative (re)imaging practices within the frameworks for this study. I borrowed from an emerging field of comic-based research (CBR) to inform my approach to data analysis. Kuttner et al. (2021) defined CBR as

neither a research methodology (a broad conceptualization of how to approach research) nor a method (a specific practice conducted during research) . . . that attracts researchers with diverse disciplinary and epistemological commitments. These researchers may go about research in quite different ways, but they share an
interest in the unique semiotic, narrative, communicative, and educative properties of the comics form for their participants, their audiences, and themselves. (p. 196)

I selected a CBR approach because it deeply connects to my 15-year relationship and success using and creating comics and graphic novels with secondary students to co-construct narratives; make meaning about social, political, and historical problems; and politicize youth by publishing and disseminating their comics. Emphasizing the iterative process of exploration, Sousanis described his CBR process as an active engagement with his own thinking where the demands of the drawings—conceptualizing what to explore and deciding how it feels and how it will manifest on the page—is a form of analysis in and of itself (Kuttner et al., 2017).

**Codes and Coding**

Data were analyzed using CBR approaches where sketches were generated as memos and individually and communally coded using inductive and deductive codes. These were then redrawn or revised through iterative sketching and restoried to generate themes. My data analysis occurred in systematic cycles including (a) data collection and sketching, (b) coding and visual memoing, and (c) restorying to generate themes (see Figure 5).
The video linked demonstrates my live engagement with data to produce a comic as an analytic memo. The comic creation itself represents my first and second-cycle coding. Viewing the time-lapse video of my process of generating the comic and arriving at a final image represents the third and final coding cycle. Thus, the annotated video, in which the embedded time-lapse video of my comic-making process is examined for more significant themes, extends into the written analysis and synthesis.

https://youtu.be/0agmZEAZGks

First Round of Coding: Listening, Sketching, and Scribbling

Before beginning to code, I listened to the audio recording immediately after the collection. This usually occurred the same evening or the following morning after class, where I initially made “mental personal notes” (Bernauer, 2015, p. 412). The first coding cycle began when I listened to the recordings “in relation to the research questions and
identify and document those terms, themes, codes, and concepts that begin to emerge” (p. 412). Like Galman’s (2021) technique of reading “hard, like really hard” (p. 402), I listened very intentionally and tried to register the sounds, words, whispers, and gestures that play and replay. During this aural immersion (Bernauer, 2015), I followed Galman’s (2021) protocol of writing words and phrases in my journal and digital sketchbook while sketching rough impressions of anything that pricked up my ears.

Second-Cycle Coding: Comics and Codes

In the second cycle, I listened again to the recordings and wrote down/sketched salient quotes and moments using digital art software on a tablet. This included my own “reflections and observations as they pertained to the research questions” that “helps to identify initial themes across participants but also facilitates the simultaneous interplay of description, analysis, interpretation, and reflexivity” (Bernauer, 2015, p. 412). I generated a comic that considered the purpose of the study and findings in relation to questions as preliminary findings and interpretation. Students then interacted with the comic and selected or generated a code. Bernauer (2015) admitted the controversy in this step but asserted, “Researchers know more than they think they know and even though there may be changes based on further analyses” (p. 412). Furthermore, in describing her arts-based, process-driven inquiry, Bhattacharya (2021) explained, “Trusting my intuition, knowing that the knowledge and insights spilling out of me, onto my free writing or the canvas, appeared for a reason” (p. 378).

Figure 6 showcases dialogue balloons containing the handwritten text of transcribed words pulled from the audio-recorded session. The captions above the panels are typed narrative descriptions of data chunks, such as words and actions from our
session. These captions are a way to share my thinking with students about how I synthesized and analyzed the data for a particular moment. Collectively, the captions and dialogue contain the initial codes or may yield other codes. *The Use of Language* color vignette of the wave embedded in the comic was a digital painting I created and printed as a large poster to use in class as a tool for engaging youth in conversations about language. Regarding the layered approaches in working with arts-based methods, it was an unusual experience inserting a piece of my tangible art within the comic art. It speaks to the multidimensionality of this work and the affordances of a comics-based format providing youth access to multiple layers of action by juxtaposing our utterances and actions with my sense making.

**Figure 6**

*Week 3 Comic for Class 7B*
To uphold the participatory nature of this study, I began each class with a warm-up activity or “do now” where jóvenes engaged with a printed cartoon image created from the previous day’s data. As they worked through the comic narrative and arrived at the final panel, they were asked to code the comic by selecting from the three options provided. They were also invited to offer their own code. At times, the codes I provided were more than mere words because these might have been too vague for youth to engage. Instead, I provided simple phrases relevant to them and the session depicted in the comic. Other times, the coding options provided served as proxies for other codes I had in mind. For example, if I wanted to code something as “reclaiming voices,” this would show up as “I want to use my voice to speak out about what I feel” on the list of options students could select. We entertained discussions to arrive at group understandings about their selections, and this coded data allowed me to revisit the comic and data to generate more precise themes. For example, I generated sketches and used captions to describe the setting’s mood, action, and context as they occurred in class. After coding with students, I revisited the audio clip to clarify the event’s details and re-story interactions between individuals. I then looked over the time-lapse video of the digital comic sketches to detect emerging themes.

After our first sessions, I asked students to close out our class time with a single word describing our time together. This later evolved into asking students to describe three moments they would like to see drawn on the next day’s comic. As students became familiar with the comics reading and coding routines, they asserted agency in telling me which moments they would like drawn into the comic for our session as it evolved in real time. For example, when something struck them as remarkable or particularly triggering,
the jóvenes would ask, “Are you going to put that in the drawings?” I would then respond, “Do you want me to put that in the comic?” We would discuss why that moment was important to them and why it merited a drawing. The shift from youth as receivers of my observed and audio-based interpretations and as member checkers to more agentive roles occurred after the second week. As the jóvenes transitioned to directing the art I produced, I could also extrapolate possible codes from their guidance and feedback. This process allowed youth to participate in data analysis and reflected my commitments to giving youth a voice in intervening in generating research data and analysis.

**Final Cycle: Time-Lapse Videos**

Viewing the time-lapse video of my process of generating the comic and arriving at a final image represented the third and final cycle of coding that extended into the written data analysis and synthesis. As evidenced in the video provided, I made separate annotations during the comic creation process and subsequent viewing of the process videos. In doing so, I sought to make visible my metacognition in the choices I made while listening and rendering drawings. As I noted the scribbled impressions, the erased markings, the drawn and redrawn, the pauses in activity, and the compositional freneticism of moving panels and elements around the page, I was a voyeur of my creative analytic process. Weaver-Hightower (2017) asserted, “Comic-making decisions were analytic decisions” (p. 227). I revised the drawings based on students’ feedback and my viewing experience to prepare for writing within and across research questions (Bernauer, 2015).

To analyze samples of student work (e.g., journals, documents, artifacts), I employed constant comparative analysis to yield thematic categories and then arranged
them in multiple combinations within and across themes. This approach was participatory as the jóvenes coded and analyzed key phrases and expressions from the audio recordings, process charts, and other documents (see Figure 7). They coded the data they generated and provided an additional word, phrase, or idea to add greater clarity, further facilitating an appreciation of patterns in relationships, similarities, and contradictions.

**Figure 7**

*Captured Image of a Student’s Coding and Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUOTE</th>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>ONE WORD OR PHRASE</th>
<th>Include in painting? Yes or No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wait, my parent had to fill this out?</td>
<td>Disagree with my EL label. I language in many ways.</td>
<td>Gurl listen to me not the ugly test.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why do we have to pick a language, be sorted, and tracked?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s a reading thing not an English language thing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Punishment/ Racist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listen to me. I am more than just a test score.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wait, Wait. What if I started...what if I grew up here?</td>
<td>Disagree with my EL label. I language in many ways.</td>
<td>I’m not gonna be able to go to the college I want</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why do we have to pick a language, be sorted, and tracked?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It’s a reading thing not an English language thing.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listen to me. I am more than just a test score.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges of CBR Methods and Research**

As an emerging field of practice forged in the margins, CBR raises questions about what qualifies as good CBR and the tools that should be employed for measuring quality and ethics within this approach (Kuttner et al., 2021). CBR practitioners are conscious of how comics can be perceived as a subaltern artform and as a research approach lacking in rigor or seriousness and are therefore deliberate about affirming the
academic legitimacy of CBR within the educational research community and across other disciplines (Forde, 2021; Galman, 2009; Kuttner et al., 2021; Sousanis, 2015; Weaver-Hightower, 2013). They accomplished this by asserting the benefits of a multimodal approach combining images and text (Kress, 2009). In the context of participatory or community-based projects, Kuttner et al. (2017) asserted the possibilities for participatory meaning-making when the researcher and participants engage in cocreating comics.

For this study, CBR practices allowed me to remain more focused on the data narrative as I approached it with my discipline as an artist. These practices also supported the participatory nature of this project by enabling ease of member checking with bi/multilingual youth participants through community coding exercises. Through the creation of sequential sketches and images as a process of analysis (Kuttner et al., 2021), refinement, and discovery (Jones & Woglo, 2013) it is possible to expand access to the data narrative in multimodal ways (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) that are inclusive, sensitive, and accessible to youth. Moreover, this approach is youth-centered and respectful of their varying locations across languages.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the conceptual tools and framework rooted in resilient resistance methodology and critical theoretical commitments, which informed the pedagogical and curricular moves and decisions within and across the qualitative 3-phase design and arts-based approaches. I also described how use of *pláticas*, art activities, and comics answered the three research questions and aligned with data sources, collection processes, CBR practices, and analysis. In the following chapters, I discuss my findings related to the themes that emerged and how they address the questions I posed.
CHAPTER FOUR

A PEDAGOGY OF RESILIENT RESISTANCE

In this chapter, I discuss and describe how a space grounded in deep relational connections and pláticas (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) afforded youth participants both time and space for crafting an affirming discourse about themselves and an oppositional discourse about their schooling experiences. I describe how a pedagogy receptive to the spoken, the seen, the heard, and the embodied emerged through pláticas to shape our taller space in ways that legitimized the lived experiences of the jóvenes to answer Research Question 1: How does an English language development space grounded in a pedagogy of resilient resistance affirm the lived experiences of bi/multilingual youth? Within the context of this research question, the following themes emerged as evidence of youth affirmations: (a) license to speak freely, (b) license to speak knowledgeably, (c) license to speak agentively. These themes first materialized in the context of a pedagogy I discovered and discuss in this chapter. The elements of knowledge and agency come into greater focus in Chapter 5 with Research Question 2, which addresses youth participatory research projects, and in Chapter 6 with Research Question 3 about the operationalizing of art to inform an organic journey culminating in resilient resistance in action.

Through a framework of resistance (Yosso, 2000), the pedagogical practices and stance within our English language development (ELD) space critically reframed language by honoring diverse modes of meaning making across a multitude of languaging practices. Drawing from various data points (i.e., researcher memos, recorded class sessions, comics, student artifacts), I describe the relationships cultivated and
actions taken to elevate the voices of Latinx youth. I also describe how centering their voices repositioned them as dignified and deeply knowledgeable jóvenes educados. I especially highlight several dialogic exchanges from our classes to emphasize the collaborative nature with which the findings emerged within the context of language. I found youth participants spoke freely, knowledgeably, and agentively when a cycle of eliciting, memorializing, and reflecting occurred through pláticas. In this way, youth voices were encouraged through pláticas, and their knowledge-making processes were captured visually and auditorily in recordings and comics for subsequent group reflection.

Thus, through an approach tapping into the sensory with multimodal methods of receptive and productive meaning making, this pedagogy extended beyond traditional language and literacy instruction across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. More importantly, it attended to youth participants’ collective embodied experiences and languaging practices by uplifting them in cartooned vignettes to consume as readers, critics, and editors. Drawing from Yosso’s framing, I call this intervention a resilient resistance pedagogy because it confronts, intervenes, and reimagines ELD policies, standards, and teaching practices to position youth at the forefront of their collective learning and their lives.

**Speaking Freely**

**On-Task Versus Off-Task Talk: Creating an Unsurveiled Language Space**

Within a loosely framed curriculum, the pláticas built into the start of every lesson as a routine practice throughout our teaching and learning were moves to prioritize our physical, mental, and emotional beings before attending to the instructional. In this way, jóvenes brought their whole selves, especially their lingering hybrid hallway
languages, and their lives on the margins of the contained classroom space into our taller.

For example, upon entering the classroom, a conversation one group was having in the hallway about hair color trickled in as the jóvenes were getting settled. When the discussion segued to what their parents will allow for their quinceañera the group offered critical commentaries about perceived threats to the integrity of their cultural traditions.

Eva: American people now, they have *quince años*. It’s so annoying.

Alice: Don’t they have their own things, like Sweet Sixteens?

Iris: Yeah, they’re taking it from us!

Me: You know what we call that? Cultural appropriation. You can use this term to describe this as something negative.

Eva: They have big dresses and they even have *chambelanes*.

Me: So, anytime a word pops up like this in our *pláticas*, I put it on the board so we can pick up new words.

This brief 4-minute exchange occurred in the 3rd week of our time together and revealed how the group perceived and experienced microaggressions by dominant white groups. It also demonstrated how a seemingly off-task *plática* afforded jóvenes a space to theorize their culture’s appropriation collectively. This exchange drew out and encouraged shared knowledge about a topic that unified them culturally and emboldened the group with a new language of opposition.

In another instance where hallway chatter meandered into our class, Alicia mentioned, “Maestra, guess what? Hugo and Violeta were almost kissing outside.” As Hugo and Violeta entered the classroom and took their seats, they were interrogated by other jóvenes about the nature of their hallway affections. Rather than shutting down the
conversation as off-task talk and moving on to our plan for the day, I asked, “Do your folks know, Hugo? ¿Violeta, tus papas saben que son novios?” I understood both Hugo and Violeta came from very religious and conservative families and likely were keeping their relationship a site-based school secret. I also knew Hugo had been experiencing emotional distress because we were monitoring it as a staff. It had also come up in class when the jóvenes commented from time to time: “Maestra, Hugo used to be depressed, but now he has a girlfriend, so he’s happy again.”

In these moments, Hugo smiled sheepishly and took nourishment from Violeta’s presence as they basked in the attention they received from our small group. Though this was not a moment I memorialized in a comic, I mention it because it reveals how the taller became a sanctuary for the jóvenes to express themselves and their emotions, despite not fitting into the planned curriculum. This conversation was not off task for Hugo and Violeta because it was about their lives. This blurring of interstitial hallway gossip and expressive adolescent theater with that of the formal classroom space challenged the hard binaries perpetuated in language learning spaces where basic interpersonal communication skills are regarded as subaltern because they are social and cognitively undemanding (Cummins, 2008), and cognitive academic language proficiency skills are the preferred mode where ELD is concerned. In dismantling on-versus off-task hierarchies, language was retooled to focus on the seen, the heard, the embodied, and the responsive to nourish, affirm, and empower the whole of bi/multilingual youth beings.

The affirming pedagogy that emerged from pláticas honored all modes of languaging, especially relational language use where traditions and cultural affirmations
are shared and discussed. As the group engaged with the comic in Figure 8, they giggled and recognized themselves, taking ownership of their words. They also recognized the content of the conversation and offered feedback in praise of the drawn girl’s hairstyle as she took back her crown. Furthermore, this comic, created in our 3rd week, marked a significant point for the jóvenes in establishing the expectation that our interactions would be captured in comics. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, their voice grew as they assumed roles as art directors who instructed me on which moments to illustrate, the dialogue that should be included, and how the design elements should be styled.

**Figure 8**

*Detail of Week 3 Comic for Class 7B*

*Note*: Comic depicts a *plática* about the cultural appropriation of *Quinceañeras.*
Deconstructing and Reimagining Linguistic Registers

As the vignettes with Alicia, Iris, and Eva, Hugo, and Violeta demonstrate, *pláticas* were central to cultivating a space of safety and trust that honored all parts of youth’s lives as inextricably linked to a multitude of languaging practices. As part of a pedagogy aimed at dignifying the multiple ways in which bi/multilingual youth language, our classes engaged in various exercises addressing the various communicative registers within the *jóvenes’* linguistic repertoires. During activities where we deconstructed and critically interrogated various modes of languaging, the *jóvenes* demonstrated an awareness of various types of English and their situational application.

Me: There’s English. Then if I put “academic” in front of it, what does that mean?
Carlitos: Fancy English.
Me: What makes it fancy?
Carlitos: You’re saying words that are not sounding like English. Grown-up English only for teachers that teach us.
Me: When do you use fancy English?
Carlitos: When I’m trying to teach my mom something.
Me: We’re going to talk about our languaging styles and what they say about us.
Carlitos: Like Ms. B. She acts part teacher, and she tries to understand us.
Me: So, is it fair to say that Ms. B has two languaging styles when she talks to you? She can do a younger languaging style, like you guys, and she does the teacher style.
Carlitos: Young thinking. That’s what I’m going to call it.
Me: Ooh! I am so making a comic about that! I hereby declare “young thinking” a languaging style!

Carlitos: Haha. I’m so smart.

Me: So, if this one is called “young thinking” what is the other one?

Carlitos: Teacher thinking. Teacher personality.

Mario: Adult thinking! Yeah, because adults use it. It is what your parents use and teachers use.

In this exchange, the jóvenes discussed communicative registers in relation to environment, individual user, and purpose. They offered their own labels and descriptions for how they made meaning of those registers. Though the conversation began with an introduction of the term “academic English,” the jóvenes took up the notion of linguistic hierarchy. They collectively made sense of how this linguistic phenomenon related to their lives. They then reimagined new ways of understanding these linguistic registers by taking ownership, first through naming and then by describing how they work. When Carlitos innovated the label “young thinking” to describe a style used when a teacher “tries to understand us,” he asserted his authority in organizing the languaging styles to fit his linguistic worldview. As Mario conceived its counterpart, which he termed “adult thinking,” he offered a compelling reason by describing how the adults around him communicate. In this moment’s recordings, Carlitos and Mario can be heard celebrating and congratulating each other for their contributions. Weeks later, the jóvenes referenced their linguistic inventions again when discussing how they should practice for presenting their project to Ms. B, the science teacher.
Carlitos: We’re going to talk to her in her language: Young thinking and science language.

Me: You’re going to practice with each other.

Fernando: We can pretend that you’re Ms. B and practice.

Carlitos: Just try to “young think,” okay, Ms. Reynoso?

Me: Okay. I’ll try not to adult think.

As a move to dignify and legitimize these newly established linguistic repertoires, young thinking and adult thinking became part of our regular classroom lexicon describing how we moved in between and through various modes of languaging. These innovations were memorialized in a comic (see Figure 9) to recognize, encourage, and cultivate jóvenes’ full linguistic repertoires.

**Figure 9**

*Comic Capturing How Jóvenes Understood and Innovated Linguistic Registers*
In another class, the jóvenes signaled a consciousness about positioning certain linguistic registers as more pedigree than others. These language hierarchies shaped how jóvenes made sense of their languaging practices concerning specific Englishes. For example, a visual analysis of the painting *The Use of Language* (see Figure 10) yielded the following exchange:

Me: What if I told you that this wave represents every type of languaging style that exists.

Juno: Look at the animals down there! They can’t get in the water no more!

Me: So who would those animals be?

Caren: It’s like Spanish was the crab and French was the turtle, and then Japanese, and Arabic . . .

Me: Where does English go?

Caren: The wave! The path!

Cristina: Some people say that English is the hardest language to learn.

Me: So if English is the hardest language to learn, which part of the picture would English be?

All: The wave! The wave! The wave!

Caren: English is like the water and the path goes down under it like . . . Choom!

Because you can’t learn it.

Me: Is all English considered the same? Is every English equal? We can go outside and listen to kindergarteners on the playground using English. Is that the kind of English at the top of the wave?

All: No.
Liliana: It’s a different English.

All: Like more advanced! A better English!

**Figure 10**

*Details of Week 3 Comic for Class 7B*

*Note.* Depicts how the *The Use of Language* poster elicited *pláticas* about language hierarchies.

**Beyond Chisme**

Me: What was your favorite part about this class?

Amaya: When we were talking about *chisme* about all the teachers.
Juno: You don’t care what the other teachers think.

Amaya: You trust us.

These reflections were shared during the final day of class over pizza and pláticas in what we called a Foodcus Group. As the jóvenes were asked to provide feedback about the class, they shared elements that were especially significant to them. Importantly, the conversation about teachers perceived as “chisme” by the jóvenes in Amaya’s group emerged in the context of our study on storytelling, specifically about who is qualified to tell someone’s story. In this lesson, we interrogated the notion of experts and who decides what it means to be an expert. As we discussed the concepts of insiders versus outsiders at the intersection of authority, the conversation suddenly pivoted to a critique of how bathroom use is regulated in the school.

Caren: I have a question. So, like, when you ask a teacher to go to the bathroom, you are like asking if you could go to the bathroom. And what if like, they say no? Am I gonna pee on myself like in the classroom? Why do I have to ask somebody so that I could go to the bathroom?

Liliana: That’s true. No, I don’t like, ask my mother. I don’t ask, “Mom, can I go to the bathroom right now?”

Caren: And what if they say no and I have to go poop? Like do I really have to tell them that?

Maria: Because they’re like, “Recess is in 10 minutes.”

Juno: Yeah, it’s bad if you hold it.

Caren: Cause like, me! Me! Me! I take like 5 minutes to go to the bathroom and then Miss, I can’t remember her name, the one girl that was pregnant—she
literally let me go to the bathroom, right? And I like I had to go number two and then she literally went into the bathroom and shouted, “Caren, come on, let’s go!” Because I took like 3 minutes and the max is 2 minutes.

Me: So, now, put yourself in the shoes of the teacher. How do we know if you are safe?

Amaya: They can see you in the cameras. They have cameras in the bathroom where you wash your hands.

Liliana: Isn’t that illegal to have a camera in the bathroom? You’re telling me . . . in the office . . . that there’s a big old TV where they can see me?

Me: You know, I really appreciate listening to you guys though, because this is the side that doesn’t get heard when you’re a teacher. We’re not aware. See? This is where we’re the outsiders, right? What you’re telling me right now, all of your stories about having to go to the bathroom and feeling embarrassed or humiliated because you got to ask in front of everybody. I’m going to have to cartoon this.

Maria: Write the story about this!

Liliana: Can I keep that one?

Amaya: Yeah, me too!

During the next week’s lesson, the notion of policing emerged again after one of the jóvenes confronted school authorities in the bathroom. Throughout this plática, staff members unusually entered and exited our classroom catching earfuls of our heated plática that named and criticized specific teachers and administrators. To resist the practice of silencing and suppression, I rejected the nervous impulse to ask the jóvenes to modify their language or tone down content during the unannounced appearances of other
staff. Related to this, Juno’s reflection about me not caring about other teachers’ thoughts and Amaya’s remark about trust demonstrates how a pedagogy committed to uncovering and encouraging hidden and silenced voices (Elenes, 1997) affirmed the jóvenes’ embodied engagements with power and surveillance rather than suppressing them.

To fortify this stance, the comic (see Figure 11) created for this event and shared with this group of six girls made visible their physical expressions from our session and memorialized their voices for multimodal consumption.

Figure 11

*Comic Depicting a Plática About Body Surveillance and Bathroom Cameras*

Following a reception of squeals and laughter, the comic was carefully read, scrutinized for accuracy, and coded using four options provided where one was an open response. Half of the group selected “It is important for the school to know how we feel”
and the other half chose “These comics are good for telling our stories.” Collectively, these coding decisions and the follow-up plática about the comic confirmed the group felt their voices were heard, their actions seen, and a response crafted as a storied comic.

In this way, the pláticas yielded testimonios about the surveilling of their bodies (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) that hammered a space for holding those experiences within the school as well as in re-storied comics. This conversation and others like it were crucial for evolving a pedagogy that sees, hears, feels, and responds to the shared moments captured in our pláticas. They redefined an institutional space of learning from top-down compliance to adult-sanctioned pláticas for jóvenes to discuss, critique, find humor, and be vulnerable. Moreover, they established the kind of trust to move into future conversations about the systemic inequities positioning them as “underachieving” according to the data on their language test and overall schooling.

**Listening to Amplify and Affirm Voices**

The previous sections framed the notion of speaking freely from a productive stance where jóvenes produced expressions of themselves in various ways. From a receptive standpoint, and as demonstrated through the comic in Figure 11, jóvenes found nourishment from seeing their interactions captured visually and their dialogue drawn in comics. Similarly, the receptive act of listening to their voices in free exchanges throughout our learning sessions honored the jóvenes’ voices. Expressing his favorite part of the class during our reflective Foodcus Group, Fernando raised his hand and softly volunteered, “the audio recordings.” Not wanting to elaborate on what he meant by audio recordings in the larger group, Fernando and his group of four other jóvenes perfectly understood his reference. Fernando was alluding to our small group sessions where we
listened to class recordings from previous sessions together. Huddling over my iPad and listening for and to their voices, these intimate listening sessions were highly requested and captivated Fernando and his four classmates with great pleasure and interest.

Fernando’s group listened to themselves making jokes in Spanish, taking risks in trying out new words and self-correcting when their syntax seemed off to them. They listened to their playful jostling over how they would share the spicy chips they ate in class. The greatest laughs were elicited by Fernando’s continuous stream of background talk about multitudinous topics, heard in patterns of interruption and tenacious recommencement as the other jóvenes kept unintentionally cutting him off. For example, Carlitos exclaimed, “Now I can hear it. I can hear it. Fernando, we’re interrupting you.” As small chatter breaks out and a frustrated Carlitos struggles to hear the rest of the recording, he calls out, “Shut up!” Then he calmly says, “I don’t hear Jackson anymore.” Fernando responds, “Jackson was always the quiet one.”

As we listen further to the recorded conversation where we are cowriting a letter to recruit teachers to participate in a survey, the group can be heard describing the linguistic register for the letter as academic. Carlitos then comments in real-time, “Ey, I say right here ‘young thinking.’” At this moment, Carlitos recognized and acknowledged a communicative register he innovated earlier in the semester to describe a casual, youth-friendly way of languaging. For this group, revisiting their “on-task” and “off-task” interactions from our learning sessions allowed them to reflect on their audible meaning-making in class, in concert with reifying a sense of joy in listening to their communal knowledge production. Although listening to their recordings was not a planned move in my lesson plan, it demonstrates the flexibility and, more importantly, the responsiveness
of a pedagogy centered on students’ interests and wants. Moreover, as a student-driven pedagogy, it was possible to leverage this request for listening to previously recorded class sessions as a high-impact strategy for eliciting student metacognition about their languaging practices and language development.

**Speaking Knowledgeably: Listen to Me! I Am More Than Just a Test Score!**

Once Eduardo entered sixth grade, he began to complain to Mrs. Ávila about the English language proficiency [ELP] test that he was required to take annually. She explained to me that he would say things like, “I don’t understand why I have to take these tests.” (Brooks, 2019, p. 179)

Once Mrs. Ávila was aware of Eduardo’s EL classification, she did not want her son to continue to experience unnecessary testing. In looking for a solution to her son’s misclassification as an (long-term) English learner, Mrs. Ávila went to Eduardo’s middle school to talk to the principal. However, she never made it past the Registrar. (Brooks, 2019, p. 181)

In these chapter excerpts, Brooks (2019) challenged the portrait of Latinx parents as passive actors in their child’s education by narrating a mother’s ardent advocacy and institutional disenfranchisement while defying the incongruous language classification of her son, labeled a long-term English learner (LTEL). In our classes, the jóvenes engaged with the Ávila family in the form of a case study. Reworked as a scaffolding assignment for understanding what researchers do and what it means to do research, the jóvenes examined four hypothetical data points inspired by Brooks’s narrative to answer a larger question: Why are Eduardo and his mother frustrated? The four data points spanned various forms of text, data visualizations, images, and legal forms including (a) a Home
Language Survey dated and signed by Mrs. Ávila’s indicating the presence of Spanish spoken in the home, (b) Eduardo’s hypothetical ELPAC data from fourth to sixth grade, (c) a hypothetical image of Eduardo with a sampling of quotes from Brooks’s chapter inside dialogue balloons emerging from his figure, and (d) a hypothetical image of Mrs. Ávila also with dialogue balloons quoting chapter text.

I’m Like Him! This Is Like Me!

As the jóvenes moved across and through each data point, they discovered Eduardo’s story, schooling experiences, frustrations, and achievement data mirrored their own. Engaging with Eduardo’s profile imparted the jóvenes license to keenly reflect on their position in the language and literacy landscape and institutionally. For example, during our pláticas about Eduardo’s data points, the jóvenes noticed Eduardo’s scores dropped an entire proficiency level between fifth and sixth grade. Recalling our previous discussions about the test’s increased difficulty as students move into middle school, they examined Eduardo’s performance across listening, speaking, reading, and writing domains and drew decisive conclusions about themselves. In one instance, Juno exclaimed, “Oh my God! I’m like him! This is like me!” I asked, “What part do you see yourself in?” Juno explained, “I listen, but not that well. I also don’t read that good.” Liliana added, “Yeah, and I talk best.” Cristina added, “I feel like I am more of a visual learner.” Then Juno remarked, “I think the test is there because people think it’s important. And if they pass, they’re going to make it through life, even though that’s not true.” The jóvenes drew parallels from their lived experiences to assert themselves as experts on their own lives. These reflections demonstrate how the jóvenes recognized the
strengths in their languaging practices and articulated a consciousness about how the test
devalued these strengths.

**We’re Literally Speaking English Now!**

In another class session, the *jóvenes* leveraged their embodied knowledge to validate Brooks’s (2019) published work. For example, the data point featuring quotes from Eduardo where he is frustrated about not being an English learner (EL) and about having to take language tests each year elicited the following interaction:

Fernando: I want to reclassify.

Me: You will. I have seen your scores and you are very, very close.

Fernando: But what if you pass all your classes but not the test.

Me: Like Eduardo? Remember, even his mom couldn’t do anything about it.

All: No!

Fernando: Wow, that’s not fair.

Me: So how can someone tell if you learned English?

Carlitos: Because I’m speaking it!

Fernando: We’re literally speaking English right now, teacher! I don’t need to learn English anymore, teacher. I know how to talk.

Me: I agree. *Yo te conozco*.

Giovanni: *Yo te conozco, mosco*.

Fernando: I’ve been taking this test for like 8 years. It’s getting annoying!

In this *plática*, Fernando experiences the same frustration as Eduardo explaining how taking the test each year is annoying. Both he and Carlitos asserted they knew English, evidenced by their use of it throughout our exchange. Fernando explicitly stated
he wanted to reclassify to English fluent to break the test’s hold on his life. Thus, the 
jóvenes not only made sense of the various data points, ranging from text, data 
visualizations, images, and legal forms, but also extended these understandings to 
articulate what they knew and what they sought to accomplish. This way, they overrode 
the labels and testing data obfuscating their embodied knowledge.

The findings were confirmed further during a class activity where the jóvenes 
coded quotes distilled from our recordings throughout our semester together. Again, the 
jóvenes were positioned as experts on their own lives to complete a chart (see Figure 12). 
The chart featured anonymous quotes from our pláticas, a set of five comprehensive 
codes distilled from our work together, an open-ended response section asking for a word 
or phrase that comes to mind, and a yes/no column asking whether the quote should be 
included in the final art projects, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. Of the 15 
responses received, two codes emerged with the highest and equal frequency. The first 
was: “Listen to me. I am more than just a test score.” The second, addressed in greater 
depth in Chapter 5, was: “Punishment/Racist.” In emphasizing the role of receptive and 
productive modalities for knowledge construction and languaging, the jóvenes interacted 
with their own words as readers and critical commenters to contribute and reveal another 
reflective layer. For example, on items coded as “Listen to me. I am more than just a test 
score,” one jóven remarked, “Gurl, listen to me not the ugly test,” and another wrote, 
“The test is not what you think it is.” Two jóvenes paired this code with words of 
encouragement such as “Don’t give up” and “You are worth it.” These phrases reveal the 
complex layers of meaning jóvenes attached to a code of supplication beseeching that 
their embodied convictions and voices be prioritized over that of a standardized test.
As experts on their own lives, our *pláticas* yielded decisive remarks from the *jóvenes* about who they are and reflected on their lived experiences taking the test and the outcomes. They drew on their embodied knowledge about the test to situate it as a perpetrator that continuously undermined their sense of self-efficacy as multilingual *jóvenes*. As such, the ELPAC materialized in our comics as an anthropomorphic cartoon villain (see Figure 13) to personify the misplaced authority it exerted over the lives of the youth. The comic coalesced their meaning-making about Eduardo’s story and consolidated their positioning within a similar narrative. Of the 18 *jóvenes* who completed the cartoon coding task, 13 selected the option “The ELPAC does not always show what you really know,” and eight selected “I want to use my voice to speak out about how unfair all of this is.” Two *jóvenes* selected “The ELL (English language learner) label is a problem,” and one *jóven* selected the open response option and wrote, “The ELPAC is mean.”
Speaking Agentively

The move toward asserting youth agency occurred as a function of the taller conditions described in the preceding sections and the pláticas giving the jóvenes license to speak freely and knowledgeably. As jóvenes found their voices were not only heard but also memorialized and subjected to their approval for accuracy through class coding exercises, they became further emboldened to call out injustices as they arose in our course work. Through our engagements with specific assignments such as Eduardo’s case
study, the jóvenes collectively experienced confirmation of their educational positioning, their culture, their family lives, and their languaging practices. Equipped with a critical consciousness and new vocabulary and paired with a sense of experiential authority, the jóvenes decisively articulated their demands for change not only for themselves but also for their community.

I Want to Reclassify! Affirming and Responding in Contested Spaces

Although most of the jóvenes agreed the ELPAC was not a valid measure of their English, their desire to pass the test and to reclassify to English fluent emerged as a significant finding undergirding this work. From day one and throughout our class sessions, the jóvenes regularly asserted this desire and later codified it in a culminating assignment. For this task, they produced a page of advice for an anthology that would be shared with other bi/multilingual learners across TK–12 grades. They drew from their lived experiences and their developing consciousness to apply their knowledge as experts in supporting others. The advice jóvenes offered included: (a) Make sure you reclassify before eighth grade; (b) Spend your free time to learn about ELD, the ELPAC, and English; (c) Understand why or how you keep retaking the test; and (d) Research your test to see if something’s off. This advice reflects insights the jóvenes distilled as necessary for other bi/multilingual learners to traverse obstacles specific to their language classification. Notably, the orientation of this advice encourages an offensive stance that also undermines the test’s integrity. For example, in his advice to “research the test,” Oscar was asked to write about a time when this suggestion could have helped him. He wrote, “When I did this, I found out that a test could be racist and biased. Be prepared.” As one of the more vocal test critics, Oscar declared, “Testing is a horrible practice.
Testing is an unfair practice that keeps ELLs from not passing.” Despite his denunciation, Oscar was concerned with understanding the details of the test questions and how the test is scored, as evidenced in the title of the next section, which reflects one of his questions.

**When Do We Get to See Our Data?**

Starting next week, I’m going to share with you your own scores. I’m teaching you right now how to look at them so we can talk about your own later. I’m going to tell you how close you came to passing each domain. Are you curious to see how you did?

This announcement was made as jóvenes learned to interpret the testing data for Eduardo’s case study. In preparation for our research projects, Eduardo’s case study was critical to understanding how bi/multilingual students are assessed, labeled, and tracked. As conversations moved to more explicit talk about scores, other jóvenes asked, “When do we get to see our data?” In each class, I asked the jóvenes, “Didn’t you get the reports for your test results in the mail? I’m sure your families saw them.” Fernando replied:

When I got this in the mail, and then I saw it, I’m like, what? What? You don’t remember how in like summer, they sent you like a package, and then you get like the scores? And they show you like this weird little graph thing and I’m like, what does this mean? You know, the funny part is, when I got the scores, I didn’t show my mom because I’m like, if I can’t understand it, I don’t think she will as well.

Fernando’s words summarized how the jóvenes did not have access to their own testing data, whether because they were not shared with them by the state, their parents, or their school or because they or their families could not make sense of the scores they were given. Fernando’s observation also highlights how knowledge is dispensed
asymmetrically to marginalize bi/multilingual Latinx populations further. The *jóvenes* and their families were not provided adequate information on how close or distant these youth were from the passing threshold. When examining Eduardo’s hypothetical data, we concluded data provided by the state were insufficient for us to understand the specifics of Eduardo’s struggles. For example, mirroring most *jóvenes’* scores, Eduardo scored “Beginning to Develop” in the reading domain. No other information, such as threshold maximums or minimums or scores across the many different task types, was provided (see Figure 14). The *jóvenes* admitted they had no idea what their scores indicated other than a general overall score showing they did not pass. More importantly, they articulated they wanted to know exactly how close they were to meeting the threshold for passing.

**Figure 14**

*Hypothetical Scores for Eduardo Modeled on Sample Reports*

![Hypothetical Scores for Eduardo Modeled on Sample Reports](image)

*Note.* From the *jóvenes’* own data and the state’s website. The broad data depicted were identified as inadequate by the *jóvenes.*
Collaborators in Their Own Assessment

Through their in-class assertions, which included verbal and physical modes of communicating, and through their written words, the jóvenes triggered action in our work together and within the larger school community. Honoring and affirming the jóvenes as experts and agentive decision makers required several unplanned interventions. Consequently, I found a resilient resistance pedagogy must move beyond the precipice where critical consciousness meets action. As the jóvenes became aware of the system and its unjust trappings, their desire to pass the test and free themselves of the ELD track became urgent and paramount. To actualize this, we needed more data, specifically ELPAC data and the kinds of “right data” that can yield accurate reading levels with oral reading inventories. For example, during our one-on-one conferences and reading assessments, the jóvenes and I spent approximately 45 minutes to an hour in a small 8’ x 12’ office near the bustle of the cafeteria kitchen. This process required cooperation from teachers, administrators, and a temporarily displaced cafeteria staff.

All 20 jóvenes were pulled intermittently from their classes, thoroughly assessed, their reading levels determined, and specific learning goals cocreated for 2 weeks on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays. This occurred contemporaneously with a literature review we conducted in class on the nature and history of testing as we prepared to design our research projects. One piece of literature the jóvenes engaged in class, and that was presented again at the start of our one-on-one sessions, was Toldson’s (2019) excerpt on the pitfalls of certain types of reading assessments. In his text, Toldson (2019) advised that determining gaps in basic reading skills is “best assessed through oral reading, not silent examinations” (p. 11).
As collaborators in their own assessment, the jóvenes were informed of the purpose and structure of each part of the assessment. They also received immediate feedback on their performance, including a review of my annotations and transcribed notes. Furthermore, the jóvenes selected the text they wished to engage for the assessment by first previewing it to appraise its level of interest, accessibility, and visual presentation. All jóvenes made use of this choice and flipped carefully through the mylar binder sleeves containing the various narrative and expository texts. As they volunteered their reasons for their selections, patterns surfaced in the leveled texts most commonly selected and revealed subtle details about their academic portraits, individually and as a group. For example, most jóvenes selected biographical texts over science-based or historical texts. Affording youth agency and including them in the assessment conversation allowed us to have honest discussions about their language and literacy challenges and to cocreate practical, meaningful learning goals where the jóvenes could not only ascend as agentive by owning their data but also by driving their own learning.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how the jóvenes produced language to construct meaning and later engaged with their meaning-making through comics, audio recordings, and coding exercises. In expanding their access and participation in critical discourses, I described how youth developed a heightened awareness about how they were positioned within the school that confirmed their lived experiences. I concluded the chapter by discussing how students moved from individual critical consciousness to a broader transformational consciousness that led them to interrogate a larger language labeling, assessment, and learning system. These findings emerged from a pedagogical stance that
began with trust from the onset that youth are knowledgeable and capable of transforming the broad framing of a critical language curriculum into meaningful learning experiences for action. By rejecting dominant practices in ELD spaces, our class made use of discursive moves to flatten linguistic and power hierarchies and build a new consciousness that materialized in centering youth voices for action as *jóvenes educados.*
CHAPTER FIVE

A TALLER FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Nourishing Resilience Through Research as Resistance

Despite Latinx individuals’ hardworking pursuit of securing the American Dream for themselves and their children, the histories of bi/multilingual youth are replete with deleterious accounts of educational experiences that continue to relegate them to the margins. Latinx families are sold an illusion that education is the guaranteed pathway toward a better life abundant with opportunity and security. However, at the systemic macro level, unequal knowledge structures about policies, administrative procedures, forms, and testing processes prevent Latinx families from questioning the system and advocating for their children. Consequently, at the micro classroom level, the education of Latinx youth is characterized by relentless microaggressions that they and their families endure across race, culture, and especially language. When these harms are unchecked, they chip away at internal resources, such as self-efficacy and sense of belonging (Pooley & Cohen, 2010), which Latinx youth source for resilience. Moreover, microaggressions steadily enacted upon bi/multilingual youth detract them from external resources that can nourish their resilience, such as social supports (Pooley & Cohen, 2010) that provide access to potentially empowering information.

Liliana: What if I know both languages but my mom put down Spanish [on the Home Language Survey] because that was my first language and what if I knew both of them at the same time?

Maria: Most kids who aren’t in ELD are probably people who spoke English first. What if I spoke English first and then Spanish and my mom filled out Spanish?
Liliana: Yeah! I did! But with my brothers.

Me: But then your mom wrote down Spanish on the Home Language Survey?
Liliana: 'Cause that was my first language.

Maria: But it wasn’t mine!

Cristina: My mom was being crazy! And she obviously wasn’t thinking right.

Liliana: My mom would have agreed with me–she would have said English and Spanish. English and Spanish! I would’ve gone with her so she can fill that form out.

Me: But is that form asking you if you speak English and Spanish? How is it worded?

Juno: Wait! ‘Do you speak a language other than English?’ Oh! Wait! Cheaters! They made her put . . .!”

Liliana: The form tricked my mother!

This exchange captures the moment when one group of jóvenes discursively arrived at a consciousness about asymmetrical knowledge structures that exist to marginalize bi/multilingual students and Latinx families within the education system. Calling out the Home Language Survey (HLS) their mothers filled out when they were first enrolled in U.S. schools, the jóvenes used the words “cheaters” and “tricked” to name the deception they felt when they recognized the one-sided nature of the questions on the HLS. This cognitive and emotional consciousness about their perceived educational betrayal is what jóvenes harnessed to shape their inquiry and fuel their action.

In the preceding chapter, I discussed three themes that emerged within a learning space of resilient resistance, concluding with the license to speak agentively. In this
chapter, I extend the theme of centering student voices to introduce findings and themes from the study’s second phase to answer Research Question 2: What issues/topics do students express as important to examine about the ELPAC? Specifically, how did students determine the issues/topics they wanted to examine about the ELPAC? To answer these questions, I describe the consciousness that arose from specific dialogic moments leading up to and within the inquiry process. Through our pláticas, jóvenes named and personally related to various microaggressions about testing, labeling, and tracking that emerged in the literature and in the activities we engaged. In their conversations about the stresses they endured, they developed a consciousness that prompted them to question their positioning within the educational system. This elevated awareness, together with the emotional responses to the questions they posed and ushered them to problematize a specific phenomenon that culminated in research and action.

As we transitioned to a taller space for action-oriented inquiry, the sustained use of pláticas enabled jóvenes to harness their individual and collective voices to sharpen their understanding of how bi/multilingual learners are labeled, tested, and tracked in U.S. schools. With the introduction of youth participatory action research (YPAR), jóvenes conceived inquiry projects and designed data collection tools. They also performed data analysis to gain clarity on how they and their families have been positioned in their schooling and how their languaging practices were situated as a deficit. In this process, the jóvenes became politicized and amassed the wherewithal to actively recruit the support of community stakeholders in their inquiry projects. Fueled by our ongoing dialogic course exercises and engagements, the jóvenes’ research evolved into expressions of resistance. They drew from their new understandings of the policies
and systems in place as well as their own lived experiences reacting to various testing microaggressions to identify the following as important issues to examine:

1. The Home Language Survey
2. The ELPAC as a tool of raciolinguistic oppression
3. The enigmatic nature of ELPAC score reports

Importantly, these topics arose distinctively among the three class sections to reveal how each group of jóvenes uniquely negotiated the meaning of their individual and collective experiences and the course content that explored policies and institutional practices. Despite the uniform deployment of lessons, class activities, and use of pláticas guiding our YPAR work, each class section gravitated toward distinct issues surrounding the ELPAC to reveal how the jóvenes’ complex identities and unique responses to various microaggressions informed their projects. From these experiences, jóvenes forged responses of resistance through their decisions in selecting the design and purpose of their studies, how they would deploy them, and how to present their findings.

“They Tricked Us!”: The Home Language Survey

Returning to the plática about the HLS, this group of jóvenes expressed a fixed interest in this phenomenon during our Five Whys activity (Vaccarino-Ruiz et al., 2021) as part of our process to identify a problem to investigate. Notably, the jóvenes learned about the HLS during Eduardo’s case study described in Chapter 4, in our transition toward this second inquiry phase. At that time, they reacted surprised, exclaiming, “Wait, my mom had to fill one of these out?” In this session, however, the jóvenes were invited to pose questions systematically and seek out root causes for social problems (Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012) through the Five Whys method (Vaccarino-Ruiz et al., 2021). These
questions and answers were captured in a process chart (see Figure 15), providing an organizing framework for conceptualizing our project.

**Figure 15**

*Process Chart Depicting the Five Whys Method*

The activity began with one jóven asking, “Why does the ELPAC exist?” As jóvenes crafted responses to this question, such as, “The government is mean” and “So you can be more fluent in the kind of English Abraham Lincoln used,” they became increasingly impassioned. The “why” structure was quickly abandoned and replaced with other interrogatives and statements revealing their feelings of frustration and deception.
The *jóvenes* became aware of how their EL label and continued testing resulted from the HLS completed 8 years ago when they were first enrolled in transitional kindergarten. As they grew frustrated, they scrutinized their mothers’ choices in indicating Spanish was spoken in the home. Although Brooks’s (2019) chapter featured explicit accounts of Eduardo’s mother admitting “had I known back when he was in Pre–K maybe I would have stuck to English” and described her “feeling guilty for having written Spanish on the HLS” (p. 181), this portion of the text was not shared with the *jóvenes* during our case study activity. Regardless of this intentional omission made out of respect for the *jóvenes*’ families, the following conversation unfolded after they introduced the idea of being tricked by the HLS:

Maria: Yes, ‘cause my mom thought she was filling it out for herself too.

Liliana: But right there, it says student.

Maria: My mom barely knew English, Liliana.

Liliana: Because it tricked us.

Cristina: I’m not even supposed to be here. My mom filled it out wrong.

Liliana: No! None of our moms filled it out wrong. It was the form.”

Maria: Right. It’s just tricking people.

Liliana: It tricked us when you were in TK or preschool or whatever, when she filled it out. It said, ‘Does your child speak another language other than English?’

So, it’s basically tricking our parents just to write Spanish and they’re like, ‘*O, ella plática Español. Ponla en ELD.*”

Juno: It’s just assuming that.

Liliana: I don’t even remember what my first language was.
Me: So, should the survey be changed?

Juno: The language survey is the problem. They see that paper—the papel—they see how good we talk Spanish. Then the ELPAC test . . . they see that, and they know we’re not that good in English. But they tricked my mom with that and now they think we’re worse in English.

This exchange and the chapter introduction excerpts reveal how jóvenes arrived at a topic for their research projects. They drew from their embodied knowledge in responding to the HLS’s microaggressions that stripped them of their multilingual identities where Spanish and English coexisted in complex ways. Moreover, they extended the notion of feeling “cheated” to include their families, specifically their mothers. The jóvenes framed the HLS as a mechanism that undermined and disparaged the literacies their Latina mothers rely on to survive and succeed amid oppressive structures (Villenas, 2005). At first, disparaging their decisions, then collectively defending the integrity of their mothers’ actions against institutional microaggressions, the jóvenes moved from “why” and “what if” questions to naming the HLS as the problem. Thus, after identifying the focus problem, the jóvenes coconstructed a research question for a problem they had experienced: How is the HLS a trap for ELs?

The Problem Is the Government: Forging a Political Resistance

As the team of jóvenes moved forward in their investigations and audits of various HLSs across California school districts, they felt compelled to interrogate the structures of power that uphold the use of this instrument. They were also interested in examining how principals, students, and parents in other schools experienced the effects of the HLS and sought to connect with them. Maria asked, “Can we go on a call to see if
they have the same problem? I want to see what the students feel about it?” Cristina suggested, “We can have principals join a Zoom.” This interest marked a pivotal moment where the jóvenes no longer perceived the HLS as a problem limited to their individual experiences, small group, or even their local school community. Instead, they understood this problem as a far-reaching obstacle impacting all bi/multilingual learners’ lives. This understanding laid the foundational groundwork for their politicization.

Though constraints in time prevented us from actualizing a large-scale investigation of the HLS across different school communities, the team was resolute about trying to “call the people who work with the ELPAC test” and trying to “talk with the government.” Above all other requests, the team consistently demanded an audience with someone in power.

Maria: I think I know what the problem is! The problem is the government! He’s the one making us do all of it!

Juno: It’s Joe Biden!

Liliana: Where’s the government?

Me: Washington DC and Sacramento, California.

Liliana: We should go to Washington DC and protest!

Me: We’re going to take this research beyond protesting and publish it and we’re going to send it to them.

Liliana: Yes!

Juno: Put it on TikTok!

Cristina: Oh my goodness! I can’t wait!
The team’s desire to speak with “the government” arose in moments when their spoken frustrations reached an emotional zenith. After learning that the HLS triggered an initial English language assessment to determine their English proficiency when they were first enrolled, Maria exclaimed, “But how is that fair for us if they [non-ELs] didn’t get tested to see if they’d pass?” Cristina asked, “Other people don’t get tested if they didn’t put Spanish? They’re being racist!” Following these impassioned exchanges, their impulse was to channel these feelings toward questions of power. In the previous conversation, the team abstractly mentioned the government and appealed to Joe Biden. However, they lacked an adequate understanding of the specific processes and political offices tasked with handling issues related to the HLS. Thus, their research took them on an unexpected path to learning more about how educational policy is created and reformed. Next is a letter the team of youth researchers and I cowrote and carefully workshopped to describe their stance and their vision for change. This letter was emailed to the office of one California state assemblymember we identified as potentially sympathetic to our concerns. As Latinx and multilingual, the assemblymember directly affected policy changes, including how the HLS is implemented.

Dear Assemblymember X,

We represent a group of seventh-grade researchers/activists from Justice Prep Charter School in Southern California. We are also students who are classified as English Learners (ELs), or more specifically, long-term English learners (LTELs). This means that like the over 204,042 California LTEL students in Grades 6–12, we have been tested, labeled, and tracked in U.S. schools for 6 or more years, many of us since kindergarten.

We are currently participating in a pilot English language development (ELD) class in our school that develops our skills as researchers. In this class, we critically examine the system that continues to test and track us. We learned that on the Home Language Survey (a document California requires for all students entering any public school/district), our parents proudly shared that Spanish was a
language in our homes, not knowing what this would mean for us. We learned that our parents did not receive information about how their responses to the Home Language Survey would affect our future classification, mandatory testing, and course placement. Because of the lack of transparency about how the Home Language Survey operates to “trap” thousands of multilingual learners like us, we experience negative success trajectories that lead to our becoming long-term English learners. As a result, we go into high school having to take noncredit-yielding courses such as ELD and are denied access to electives and high-quality learning opportunities enjoyed by non-ELs. Moreover, each year, we are forced to take the English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC). We stand no hope of ever getting off the English learner track until we pass this test, even though many of our non-EL peers who struggle with language and literacy would also likely not pass. No other test exists with this kind of absolute power over a student’s whole being. The fact that this test specifically controls and negatively impacts the futures of multilingual students of color in California is a huge problem.

We kindly request a brief 10-minute audience on Zoom with you to receive advice about steps we can take as youth researchers and activists to create change in the way Home Language Surveys are administered.

We understand that though you are not directly connected to our region, you represent areas with large populations of students just like us and you share in our Latinx identities. Together, we believe we can be advocates and changemakers for all multilingual students and families in California.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Caren (7th-grade student)  
Maria (7th-grade student)  
Juno (7th-grade student)  
Amaya (7th-grade student)  
Liliana (7th-grade student)  
Cristina (7th-grade student)  
Zulema Reynoso (Teacher and Youth Participatory Action Research Project facilitator)

The act of conceptualizing this letter encompassed resistance in action. In composing every word, phrase, and statistic, the jóvenes participated in a highly demanding act of acquiring a new oppositional vocabulary to prepare them for speaking out with high-stakes audiences. The team distilled their new understandings from their
inquiry efforts about the HLS, language testing mechanisms, and tracking. They coalesced these insights with their embodied knowledge to present a forceful testimonio and supplication for reform. Within 5 minutes of sending the letter, we received a response from the assemblymember’s office (see Figure 16).

**Figure 16**
*Response From the Assemblymember’s Campaign Manager Guaranteeing an Audience With Him*

This is everything.

Asm is in Mexico City as part of a trade delegation and returns later this week.

Is there a specific date or a couple of dates you might want to suggest - or are you looking for first available.

Either way - I’ll plug y’all in.

Campaign Manager

Sent from my iPhone

As the purpose of their research took on greater urgency with real consequences, the jóvenes grew more invested in learning how to use their voices to advocate for themselves and others like them. Beyond understanding the political processes of educational reform, the jóvenes sought to sharpen their communication skills to convey their ideas with clarity and precision in privileged spaces of power. They actualized this by breaking up the letter into smaller chunks and reworking it into a script. After distributing the parts they planned to read, they rehearsed their lines and posted them on large poster paper in preparation for the Zoom meeting with the assemblymember. At the pinnacle of their action and inquiry, the jóvenes used this opportunity to present their findings and operationalize their resistance in a high-stakes setting with a policymaker.
“It’s Racist Because They Know We’re Mexicans”: ELPAC Raciolinguistic Aggressions

The way in which the jóvenes expressed their distress from institutional positioning and testing was a function of the group dynamic and their nuanced identities. Because each class section of jóvenes constructed its own culture and relationships, how each group spoke out about their experiences navigating oppressive structures varied greatly. Thus, specific class content and activities elicited stronger reactions in one group than another, consequently yielding three different inquiry projects across the three sections of ELD. For one research team, the HLS from Eduardo’s case study activity resonated most and shaped their research project. For the group of jóvenes described in this section, the literature review we conducted to prepare for designing our inquiry projects was most impactful. The scholarship we engaged enabled jóvenes to recover and reframe their sense of self-efficacy in ways that fortified their resilience amid the stress of the ELPAC.

Before the literature review, these jóvenes regularly articulated the harms of the ELPAC in ways where they first deprecated themselves, then made light of it in resignation. For example, during the analysis of Eduardo’s ELPAC scores from the case study activity, one jóven expressed his frustration after learning that the test gets harder in middle school. Noting the drop in Educardo’s scores from a 3 in fifth grade to a 2 in sixth grade, Alex exclaimed, “It’s not the same test! The test gets harder!” Oscar sighed, “Ugh. I’m going to fail.” Alice added, “I’ll probably pass in eighth grade.” Alice’s slightly more hopeful remark took up Oscar’s despair that although she would not pass this year as a seventh grader, she would likely pass as an eighth grader.
The *jóvenes*’ dismal sense of self-efficacy was further revealed during a vocabulary frontloading exercise in preparation for our literature review. As part of the prereading activity, the *jóvenes* discussed the meaning of new words and organized them into categories. When they came across the word “assessed,” they negotiated whether to categorize the term under the heading of “student” or “problem.” One *joven* suggested categorizing it under the “student” heading because “it describes what you’re [students are] doing.” Another *joven* offered a different perspective calling it a problem because “you have to pass a test—you have to learn extra. We’re doing it for nothing.” This moment characterizes the kinds of recurrent push-pull tensions characteristic of this group. The *jóvenes* communicated the stress they endured in reconciling the institutional authority that determined how they are labeled, tested, and tracked. At first, they acknowledged the neutral legitimacy of the system by framing the word “assessed” as merely something the students are doing. In doing so, they also accepted that they are responsible for falling short of meeting the established standards rather than finding fault with the standards themselves. The submission to their EL language classification coincided with a second discursive thread that emerged when other *jóvenes* in the group refused to accept the unfairness of institutional practices until the *jóvenes* finally reached a point of frustration and resignation.

As the *jóvenes* continued deliberating over the vocabulary words, the term “high-stakes” arose. They first offered their initial impressions of the term’s meaning, defining it as “really hard but also really important.” Then the conversation moved in directions where the *jóvenes* directly linked the test to racial and linguistic violence.

Me: What is something else that is high-stakes?
Oscar: Your body.

Hugo: Depression. Sadness.

Alice: Dizziness.

Oscar: Why don’t they fix it? Don’t they feel bad for the people that can’t pass it?

What if they went through it? Won’t they feel bad?

Hugo: Testing allows ELLs only to take the test.

Alex: It’s racist because they know we’re Mexicans and we don’t know English.

Oscar: Testing is a horrible practice. Testing is an unfair practice that keeps English language learners from not passing.

In this exchange, the jóvenes related the notion of high stakes as viscerally intertwined in body and emotion, voicing the collective microaggressions they endured throughout their schooling that had been silenced and kept dormant.

From Resignation to Resistance

As jóvenes grew their oppositional lexicon, they directly connected new terms and concepts to their lived experiences. They applied these understandings to salient points from the brief literature review we conducted to examine issues in testing. Following the vocabulary prereading activity, the jóvenes engaged articles, reports, and chapters that sampled texts in Chapter 2 of this dissertation on critical perspectives about testing (Blanton, 2000; Carroll & Bailey, 2016; Toldson, 2019; Wolf et al., 2010). After engaging with the literature, the jóvenes were exposed to alternative perspectives on testing that prompted them to question the integrity of the ELPAC as a valid measure of their academic and linguistic capabilities. However, it was not until the Five Whys exercise that the extent to which the literature had resonated with the jóvenes became
evident. This marked a turning point in our work, ushering in a new consciousness among jóvenes. With the ELPAC in their crosshairs, they shifted from finding fault in themselves and instead took aim at a larger system of racist language testing schemes they had no hand in creating or controlling.

Me: Today’s class is purely dialogic. What is dialogic?

Alex: Something with dialogue?

Hugo: A conversation between two people.

Me: Right. What are we interested in doing? What do we want to know? What do we want to change? We’re going to talk about the ELPAC in general.

Alex: Racist!

Me: Tell me more.

Alice: The ELPAC is racist because of—thinking darker-skinned Mexicans are not able to pass the ELPAC.

Me: Ah, you’re bringing up the study we read about the history of testing the IQ of Mexican Americans. But what is the connection? Do you remember what we learned about bias?

Oscar: The questions have errors. The ELPAC is hard even for English language learners and non-ELs.

Alex: If the test is hard for non-English learners not in ELD, why aren’t they taking the test?

This exchange occurred within our Five Whys activity as the jóvenes recalled segments from our literature review. They referenced Blanton’s (2000) article on the history of intelligence testing of Mexican Americans and African Americans in Texas
during the 1920s. In this article, Blanton described how intelligence testing was weaponized against Mexican Americans to perpetuate racist and classist pseudoscientific narratives that upheld white supremacy. Blanton (2000) problematized the connections between these historical testing practices and modern-day standardized tests by posing the question: “If the tests now are supposedly achievement-oriented and carefully prepared so as to not privilege white, middle-class life experiences, then why do African American and Mexican American schoolchildren still score lower than whites” (p. 1024).

After engaging with excerpts from this text and a policy brief by Wolf et al. (2010) cautioning about language assessment “test questions that may be biased against ELLs,” the jóvenes reflected on their encounters with questions that were culturally and academically irrelevant to their lives and learning experiences. For example, Oscar asked, “Why can’t it [the ELPAC] be about things we learned in class? They just put random things that we don’t know. It’s like about a white person on a horse or in a barn, like going places.” In this discussion, Oscar also compared the ELPAC to another interim assessment all students take 3 times a year to measure their progress across various content areas. He added that, unlike the ELPAC, this test assesses them on content they recognized from their classes and is more useful and relevant to their learning.

As the jóvenes found allies in the scholars who authored the literature, they gradually reconstructed their sense of self-efficacy. They journeyed on a path that turned their gaze outward toward their non-EL peers and a testing scheme undergirded by raciolinguistic ideologies. Together with the problem of racism and bias in testing, the jóvenes grew closer to framing their inquiry projects as explorations of larger questions. Among these questions included duplicitous motivations to test Latinx youth, the
integrity of the instruments used to test Latinx youth’s proficiency, and whether the problem was, in fact, a language phenomenon or a literacy phenomenon. For example, when Oscar mentioned that the ELPAC was hard for non-ELs as well, he referred to a quantitative study (Carroll & Bailey, 2016) revealing “sizable differences in nonproficient classifications for ELLs, non-ELLs, and a constructed subgroup of academically high-performing students” (p. 23). Moreover, as the jóvenes learned the term “false nonmasters” in the context of EL students who might be proficient, including those identified as high performing EL students, they reconsidered the test’s authority as misplaced and dubious.

The jóvenes grew increasingly curious about whether their non-EL peers could pass the test. This interest yielded the research question for their project: How do non-ELs react to the ELPAC? Inspired by Carroll and Bailey’s (2016) research, the jóvenes initially conceptualized giving a condensed version of the ELPAC practice test to their non-EL peers to explore how many of their peers would fall short of proficiency thresholds. One jóven suggested, “How about, . . . Why don’t we give it [the ELPAC] to non-ELs because they’ve never seen the test and they’ve never had to struggle the way we did.” However, after discussing the ethical implications and harms of this approach, the jóvenes modified their design by surveying their peers about the ELPAC rather than testing them with it.

At first, the jóvenes were disappointed they would not be testing their peers. Before their design modification from a test to a survey, they regularly remarked, “then they’ll know how it feels.” In this way, they were looking to fortify the protective factors linked to resilience (Pooley & Cohen, 2010), specifically in their sense of belonging, such
as being encouraged by their non-EL peers and feeling accepted and valued (Goodenow, 1993). When I asked the jóvenes what would happen if their non-EL peers did not pass, one joven responded, “Then they’ll know our struggle.” Here, the protective factor of social support was sought by the jóvenes in their desire to elicit emotions from non-EL peers, especially empathy for their struggle.

As the eight jóvenes worked in pairs to curate the content for each of the listening, speaking, reading, and writing domains of the ELPAC featured on the survey, they carefully selected the most challenging questions and tasks. Notably, the time and effort put into developing the survey were substantial. Three jóvenes spent their entire lunch period recording and rerecording passages for the portion featuring the listening domain until they were satisfied with the quality of their reading performance. Meanwhile, as they read and reread the passages and listened to the quality of their recordings, they incidentally grew their fluency.

Furthermore, in their commitment to making their “struggle” known, they drafted letters to teachers asking for their cooperation in deploying the electronic survey to their non-EL students in their Study Skills classes. They also included a request for the release of select students who would be interviewed following the survey. This decision to conduct one-on-one interviews arose from the jóvenes’ inquisitiveness about their peers’ impressions regarding the ELPAC questions, undergirded by aspirations of expanding their sphere of social support. During a data analysis session, the jóvenes remarked, “Those three people are allies—the ones who said it [the ELPAC] was not useful.” Thus, in choosing to examine how non-ELs reacted to the ELPAC, this team of jóvenes staged their resistance by inviting others to experience a snapshot of their “struggles” to promote
understanding of “how hard this really is.” In doing so, these jovenes took a proactive stance to expand their sphere of support.

“It Doesn’t Look Understandable”: The Elusive Nature of ELPAC Scores

Earlier in Chapter 4, I described how one joven refrained from showing his mother his ELPAC scores that arrived in the mail. Describing the document as a “weird little graph thing,” this joven problematized the poor access to high-quality information available to him and his family and identified this as a source of stress. In one class session, Fernando’s voice cracked as he vociferated, “Teacher, I’m still mad at how I didn’t pass because I’ve been reading pages of straight-up reading for 8 years!” Here, Fernando does not identify a specific area of weakness in his performance across speaking, reading, writing, or listening that is responsible for his inability to pass the test. In the absence of specific data revealing how he performed across each of the four domains, he voiced his frustration at not understanding why he continues to fail the test.

Reflecting on their initial confusion over how to interpret their scores, this team of jovenes drew from our previous one-on-one reading assessments and data talks described in Chapter 4 to conceptualize their inquiry project. During these data conversations, the jovenes received granular information about their proximity to cut scores and were presented with a comprehensive profile of their performance. With this information, they could demystify the structure of the test, uncover how points are distributed across each section, and locate themselves more precisely to traverse the paltry reports from the state.

Fernando: You know why this is really good actually? When I got this in the mail and I saw it, I’m like what is this?

Carlitos: Oh. Your scores. Oh yeah.
Me: So you want to show Ms. B your data so you can explain it to her and videotape yourselves doing it? Now, by doing this, what are we trying to explore or show?

Fernando: It doesn’t look understandable. It’s showing you false information about the scores you have.

Giovani: Maybe you are better but that day you are not 100%, y por eso le presentamos a Ms. B porque ella nos conoce como hablamos en English.

Me: Now, we ask ourselves: Why are we doing the data talk with Ms. B?

Carlitos: Teachers need to understand data about the ELPAC.

Me: I don’t have a mic so I’ll drop marker. Are you saying that teachers don’t understand how the ELPAC works?

Carlitos: Uh-huh.

Fernando: Yeah, or our parents.

Me: So, what is it that we want to do?

Carlitos: We want to teach the teachers, adults, and the community of the school.

As this exchange demonstrates, this team of jóvenes decisively identified the topic they wanted to examine because of the uncertainty of not knowing details about why they continue to fail the ELPAC and their consequent placement in ELD classes. Like the group of jóvenes that criticized transparency issues surrounding the Home Language Survey, the youth in this group raised concerns about the asymmetrical distribution of knowledge that impacts bi/multilingual learners. Vague state reports showcasing broad ranges of score intervals linked to levels spanning 1–4 offered minimal information and little direction for the jóvenes, their families, and their teachers. Thus, for this team of
researchers, the path to determining their research topic occurred during a *plática* moment where they discursively problematized knowledge structures that relegate bi/multilingual learners, their families, and their teachers to states of obscurity and disempowerment. Motivated by this information, the *jóvenes* crafted the following research question: How can students help teachers and parents better understand ELPAC scores/data?

**From Students to Staff Developers: Redistributing Knowledge and Power**

With a research question in place, the *jóvenes* fashioned the details of their project design with a focus on (a) exploring what teachers already know and (b) devising a response to any perceived gaps. Initially, the *jóvenes* decided to present their data to a 1st-year teacher whom they knew and trusted, though time constraints prevented us from finding a mutually convenient time during the school day. Then, the *jóvenes* suggested presenting to a group of teachers and following up with questions. In the following *plática*, the level of excitement reaches unprecedented levels in what I hastily jotted and described in my researcher notes as “excited, laughter—so happy—space of joy.”

Carlitos: Why don’t we ask, after we do our presentation, if they have any questions about the ELPAC data. Like, did they know the stuff we said?

Fernando: So basically, we’re going to show them this [Eduardo’s ELPAC score report] then we’re going to ask them what they saw or learned, or if they know what they’re seeing. Then we’ll teach them. Then we’ll see if they understand the score.

Me: Do you want to do a presentation for all of the middle school teachers?

Fernando: That’s scary though.
Calitos: Oh! I got an idea! Can we have all of the teachers down there, and then we can go up to the stage and present our data or what we know about data and what we want you guys to know about data?

Me: I love it! So, you want to do a staff presentation. Okay, would you like to do a survey with the teachers?

Fernando: We could show them a picture of an ELPAC score and then ask, what do you understand from this ELPAC score, then show them a text box.

Carlitos: (Gasping loudly and thrusting his hand up) I’m gonna have a heart attack!

Me: Okay! Go!

Carlitos: Why don’t we do what Mr. V did to us last year! Ask, what do you wonder? Or what were you thinking about the state of ELPAC data? What do you think this is?

Fernando: Then we go to the second image and ask, what do you understand of these scores?

Carlitos: We can’t tell them what they are. It’s like a quiz.

Fernando: Then we could do a bonus question: Did this help?

At this moment, the jóvenes experienced exhilaration as they generated plans for disseminating their expert knowledge with teachers. When Carlitos exclaimed he was going to have a heart attack, he found excitement in reversing student and teacher roles by suggesting the questioning methods Mr. V used with him in another class with teachers. In this way, the jóvenes eagerly embraced their burgeoning roles as authorities in esoteric understandings of ELPAC scores, thereby redefining their status from
knowledge outsiders to privileged insiders. In applying this new knowledge, the jóvenes devised a survey for educators that compared the state’s ELPAC score report with a reimagined version of their own. They drafted a letter to solicit participation from select teachers, administrators, and staff whom the jóvenes determined could offer useful insights for informing their projects and improving their data design (see Figure 17).

Figure 17

Signed and Embellished Recruitment Letter Created by Jóvenes for Teachers and Staff

Dear Ms.

As part of our action research project, we (7th-graders in section C) are gathering information to learn more about how teachers and families understand ELPAC data. We would GREATLY appreciate your participation in a survey we created.

The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete and your responses will be anonymous. We hope to have all survey responses in by Wednesday, October 26 or sooner so that we have enough time to analyze the results.

Your time and participation is very important to helping us build our project. Most of all, you will help us become changemakers that want to improve the way data is presented to individuals who care about the English learners in their lives.

Thank you for your support!

Warmly,

(Seventh-Graders in Section C)

Please scan this code to access the survey.

Please reach out to our facilitator Ms. Reynoso at...
As part of their resistance in action, the jóvenes positioned themselves as experts to evaluate how teachers made sense of ELPAC data. Furthermore, they conceptualized new ways of displaying the data to include more granular information about a student’s performance while making it visually intuitive. They solicited feedback from educators, carefully analyzed it, and applied it to rework their design for greater clarity. As the culminating action component to their research projects, the jóvenes were invited to deliver a professional development session to the network’s TK–8 teachers and staff on interpreting and analyzing ELPAC data ahead of the spring testing schedule.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described how the three teams of jóvenes drew from their knowledge and lived experiences to design and expand their learning in purposeful ways through inquiry and action. Each class section’s nuanced culture and personalities surfaced as specific scaffolding exercises resonated uniquely across the three groups. These activities elicited pláticas that ushered jóvenes toward identifying and articulating a problem for their projects and a subsequent action in response to the problem. The jóvenes nourished their resilience by fashioning inquiry projects and action plans that attended to protective factors such as their sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and social support. Furthermore, they operationalized their new oppositional vocabulary for strategizing their survival amid the stresses imposed by testing, labeling, and tracking schemes. Through their understanding of transparency issues surrounding the HLS, the pernicious racial and biased underpinnings of the ELPAC, and the byzantine constitution of ELPAC score reports and data, the jóvenes elevated their voices and consciousness for community action. This action permeated the final phase of this study and materialized as
an act of creative resistance through art. As I describe in Chapter 6, the arts offered the jóvenes a way to memorialize our journey and synthesize the material and conceptual with the embodied.
CHAPTER SIX
ENGAGING AND REFRAMING WITH ART

In this chapter, I describe how art became a tool for honoring jóvenes’ spoken words, stories about their families and homes, and their lived experiences to answer Research Question 3: How can the arts provide bi/multilingual youth a way to engage with and reframe their schooling experiences? I organize this chapter into two parts to answer this question. First, I return to the use of comics introduced in Chapter 4 as a pedagogical tool for creating an affirming space. I also bring into sharper focus how comics emerged as an artistic device for honoring the languaging practices, meaning-making processes, and multifaceted identities of bi/multilingual youth. Specifically, I highlight how comics fostered a “shared cultural intimacy” (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020) among bi/multilingual youth to make visible their everyday struggles as LTELs and their individual and collective strategies for nourishing their resilience. In the second part of this chapter, I spotlight the art production that occurred as jóvenes moved from a taller for inquiry and action from Chapter 5 to a liberating taller space for materializing the political, conceptual, and embodied in visceral paintings and poetry.

Part I: Comics as Microaffirmations

Each joven brought unique experiences, knowledge, and histories to our class sessions that firmly challenged universalizing paradigms of bi/multilingual students as a monolith. These complex youth identities were best negotiated not with words but with cartooned retellings that storyboarded our pláticas and captured key relational moments of our time together. In the same way that pláticas encouraged and elevated youth voices, comics afforded a platform for validating those interactions as dignified, gratifying, and
significant in material ways. Thus, comics offered a witness to the lives of the jóvenes by capturing the everyday indignities (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020) of schooling microaggressions that emerged as topics in our pláticas and reworked them into multimodal counterstories. Moreover, through comic affirmations, the jóvenes fortified their sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and social support network to muster agency for subsequently taking ownership of the comic production process and becoming artistic directors of their own illustrated testimonios.

Yo Te Veo. Tu Te Ves. Do We See the Same Thing?

As described in Chapter 3, I made use of comics as an analytical tool to viscerally connect with and make meaning of the recorded voices and sounds from our class sessions. Through my process of deep listening, sketching, theming, and theorizing, I crafted panels that distilled key moments of our time together. As a sequential artform, comics are particularly powerful for emphasizing creator voice (Kuttner et al., 2021). As a researcher, I wanted to ensure the jóvenes could easily interact with my thinking in accessible, multimodal ways. As cartoons generated from my perspective, comics initially served to transmit illustrated vignettes of counterstories the youth shared in our pláticas. In this receptive posture, the jóvenes engaged with the comics as microaffirmations. They regularly searched for themselves in the pictures and read through the dialogue balloons to take credit for their contributions.

Over time, however, I discovered the jóvenes altered the way they interacted with the visual stories. In taking a more active stance regarding the content and execution of the illustrated story, the jóvenes positioned themselves as stakeholding protagonists, creators, and theorists. As they became vested consumers of our comics, the jóvenes
intervened in my production process by contributing alternative perspectives, making recommendations to sharpen the accuracy of a given account, and sometimes challenging the technical execution of a comic narrative or character representation. For example, during our second comic reading/viewing (see Figure 18), the jóvenes provided critiques and offered direction on how they should be rendered.

Figure 18

Two Detailed Vignettes From Week 3 Comic for Class 7B
Juno: This is us, right?
Me: Yes, that’s you.
Juno: Ah! That’s me because I said I like French!
Maria: ¿Dónde estoy yo?
Juno: But you forgot my glasses.
Me: I don’t want to make them exactly like you. Do you want me to? I want to protect your identity.
Juno: Can I have glasses?
Liliana: I give you permission.
Maria: Use my identity. It’s fine.
Me: You really want me to draw you as you are?
Maria: Maestra, we give you permission.
Liliana: Don’t forget how my hair’s always up.
Cristina: Don’t forget my beauty mark.
Maria: I like how you designed this, Miss.

The jóvenes insisted on more accurate representations of themselves and were afforded the authority to make those requests. Prior to this, I assumed more universal representations of youth would be sufficient to convey the essence of a moment. However, an impressionist version of themselves would not suffice. As evidenced in their demands for accuracy, the jóvenes made clear they were willing to waive their anonymity in exchange for seeing themselves in sharper focus and decisively taking ownership of the actions and words depicted. This was especially important because there is a dearth of mainstream comics featuring Latinx/Chicanx youth.
With the jóvenes’ increased agency in the production process, a new way of employing comics beyond microaffirming ways surfaced. The purpose of our comics shifted from receptive cultural and linguistic affirmations to productive devices for counterstorytelling (Pérez Huber et al., 2018). By taking control of the narrative and its execution as a sequential artform, my role as a comic-maker, storyteller, and researcher also became accountable to the jóvenes. Thus, comics furnished a stage to hold all of us, not as teacher-students or as researcher-participants but as dynamic characters with multiple roles in an unfolding story about our shared time together. Like the splintering that gives way to a fugue, comics afforded us a contrapuntal platform for theorizing and reframing our experiences in ways where relationships, language, emotions, and actions transcended traditional schooling spaces and dominant centers of power.

Creating Access With Comics

To flatten adult–student/researcher–participant hierarchies, comics provided accessible and multimodal opportunities for youth to engage with our collective experiences. They also allowed youth to interact with the theoretical and analytical underpinnings coursing through cartoon memos that stemmed from my own meaning-making. In this way, comics afforded opportunities for disseminating complex ideas to youth audiences outside of academia to democratize knowledge production and distribution. Buttressed with visual support, the analytic codes included at the end of each comic provided an additional layer for discussion among jóvenes that elicited theoretical conversations about the comic content.
For example, in the comic panels (see Figure 19), the jóvenes were invited to engage with my thinking and theoretical impressions to frontload the subsequent selection of codes. After reading the comic page, they negotiated their coding selections about how they viewed themselves in relation to language classifications.

**Figure 19**

*Two Panel Details From Week 3 Comic for Class 7B*

Of the three prewritten options available, two jóvenes marked, “I am an English learner.” They agreed they did not doubt their English proficiency, but because the jóvenes had not passed the ELPAC, this was the reality of what they were. One joven firmly asserted, “I am definitely not an English learner” and marked the corresponding option without further discussion. Three jóvenes selected, “I’m just a student trying to understand academic English.” They cited the panel showing the wave where English was described as “the hardest language” and the panel where the “little picture of the
mean ELPAC” appears. Across these exchanges, the jóvenes deliberated on how the ELPAC enforces language classifications that dismiss their languaging practices.

Returning to the comic about Eduardo’s education journey (see Figure 13), the codes were especially poignant for the jóvenes and elicited robust discussions about their classification status. For example, in surveying the first coding option, “The ELPAC does not always show what you know,” one joven mentioned, “If I’m so smart then how come I haven’t passed the test?” This moment highlights how the increased theoretical engagement of jóvenes through coding processes and discourse yielded important contributions to understanding how the jóvenes made meaning of their schooling experiences and testing microaggressions. By capitalizing on the multimodality of comics with dynamic word-picture interaction, the jóvenes were invited to engage with presentations of “data and analysis, theory and practice, the concrete and the subjective, or the official story and the counterstory” (Kuttner et al., 2021, p. 201).

**Youth as Art Directors**

Our collective schooling experiences became a conscious time for scripting the scenes for our comic panels and crystalized the participatory nature of this work. As the jóvenes took increasingly active roles, they determined the comics’ style and content, and directed how the action should unfold. By Week 3, the jóvenes communicated their expectations of receiving a comic each Thursday that storied our previous day’s class session. Upon entering class, one joven asked, “Oh maestra, the comics!” Another joven behind her asked, “Yeah, do you have any comics?” Here, the jóvenes exacted a production demand that positioned me as an artist and themselves as art directors.
Following their defined timelines for comics production, the jovenes instructed me on the content of the comics at the end of our class sessions and in real time. This initiated a routine where each session closed with the jovenes naming three moments from our class that they wished to have drawn in the comics. At times, however, particularly emotional or humorous moments prompted them to call out an instance they felt warranted inclusion in the next day’s comic. This phenomenon was first introduced in Chapter 4 when they requested the comic depicting their described experiences with the school’s bathroom surveillance (see Figure 11). At the conclusion of the conversation, Maria exclaimed, “Write the comic about this!”

In another example, Carlitos shared how his Spanish teacher mistakenly called him Kalac, a funny bird character from a story they had read earlier that day. In our class, Carlitos reveled in subdued amusement, fighting a smile from the attention he received from his peers as they continued to call him Kalac. Amid the laughter and entertainment, everyone in class demanded this moment be captured in a comic, including Carlitos (see Figure 20). They also made additional requests at the end of class for scenes that depicted our conversation about wanting to stay inside the classroom during their lunch. That day, we were on a “heat schedule,” and our room was where teachers typically gathered for lunch. Despite sharing the space with their teachers and the potentially awkward teacher gossip, the jovenes elected to remain in the room, stating, “Nosotros somos Mexicanos y nos gustan los chismes” (We are Mexican and we like gossip).
In instances such as this, the jóvenes drove our comic storylines with attention to nuanced moments that transmitted the unique character of each group. As the jóvenes increasingly vocalized their recommendations and guidance for comics production, I transitioned into an artist-facilitator role. Art therapist Cathy Moon (2002) described this arrangement as a collaboration where the facilitator takes on a subordinate role as a tool “to remain true to the client’s intentions and to support the client’s exercise of choice and control over the artistic process” (p. 218). In this way, comic arts afforded jóvenes a unique opportunity to exercise agency and coauthor their narratives.
Part II: It’s Not Me, It’s You

Art is not neutral. It either upholds or disrupts the status quo, advancing or regressing justice. We are living now inside the imagination of people who thought economic disparity and environmental destruction were acceptable costs for their power. It is our right and responsibility to write ourselves into the future.

Visionary fiction is neither utopian nor dystopian, instead it is like real life: Hard, realistic. . . . Hopeful as a strategy. . . . Fiction that centers those who are currently marginalized—not to be nice, but because those who survive on the margins tend to be the most experientially innovative—practicing survival-based efficiency, doing the most with the least, an important skill area on a planet whose resources are under assault by less marginalized people. (Brown, 2017, pp.197–198)

Whether in writing or in painting, Brown’s (2017) words are especially relevant and vital for exposing the lived realities, resistance, and visionary hope in the creative work of Latinx youth. Manifesting their resilience as expression, the work created by the jóvenes in this study viscerally captured not only the embodied harms exacted by political, racial, and linguistic oppression but also their imagined survival against all odds. In this section, I discuss how the arts afforded jóvenes a way to transform the walls of a traditional classroom into a liberating taller space in the following ways: (a) creating a studio space for unleashing youth’s bodies, minds, emotions, family histories and pedagogies of the home; (b) coalescing the lived with the learned to paint an embodied resistance; and (c) fashioning a resilient resistance aesthetic.
Across these findings, I bring attention to the nuanced ways the arts surfaced spatial and relational conditions that deeply unified the jóvenes in collective compassion, resolve, and strengths.

A Taller of Sobrevivencia

Galván’s (2006) framing of sobrevivencia as beyond survival and toward a pursuit of satiating “our hopes and dreams in creative and joyful ways” (p. 163) is helpful for understanding the spatial transformation that occurred when we shifted from a taller for inquiry to one of creating. From our time together nurturing relationships and constructing knowledge, the jóvenes drew from replenished reserves of self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and social support to bring their whole selves to this space. This ushered in a spirituality that permeated our creative taller space for establishing what Villenas (2005) described as “communal spaces of resolve and resilience” but also where “humor is also at work” (p. 275). These natural and spiritual orientations to navigating institutional obstacles are modeled by and imparted to Latinx youth by their mothers and family throughout their childhood. Thus, when jóvenes abandoned the physical and intellectual constraints of their desks and chairs for unstructured ways of being in an open studio space, strategies of sobrevivencia surfaced in the intimate marginal conversations and frenetic sounds of the studio. The unbounded conditions of the studio prompted the jóvenes to share pieces of themselves, their experiences, and their families in unguarded and communal ways that had not occurred before.

In our first studio session, we took our places along carpeted floors, a blank 9’ x 4.5’ primed canvas sheet, and a chromatic smorgasbord of paints and brushes of all sizes
(see Figure 21). In one group, the *jóvenes* stood over the unrolled canvas sheet and began to articulate their ideas fusing humor to offset notions of doom.

**Figure 21**

*Art Materials*

*Note.* (Left) Image of art materials and canvas on floor. (Right) A *jóven* looks down upon the blank canvas as she conceptualizes and discusses ideas with her peers.

Juno: You know how butterflies start as a caterpillar–you can put a caterpillar and then small to big to when they find out they’re going to be stuck in ELD forever.

Maria: We could do like a caterpillar in its cycle.

Juno: It turns into a butterfly and then when it gets big and then they find out they’re going to be in ELD forever, then they get sad.

Liliana: What’s up with you and sad?

Maria: She’s being depressed, guys.

In this exchange, Maria and Liliana met Juno’s pessimistic description of being in ELD forever with sassy humor that acknowledged the difficulties they faced in getting
off the ELD track while also calling out the sad resignation in Juno’s stance. Maria’s mention of Juno’s depressed disposition was delivered with a gentle affirming smile and an eye roll assuring Juno her sentiment was temporary. In this way, the group of jóvenes supported each other while working through their denigrating schooling experiences to conceptualize them visually and collectively.

In another intimate moment, the jóvenes were spread out on the floor, working in deep concentration on different parts of the canvas (see Figure 22) as I managed their music requests on my device. The addition of music, along with the unconstrained movement of jóvenes casually positioned about the floor, pencils and rulers in hand, ruptured the institutional reality of our location as youth engaged in bittersweet reminiscing about their pet dogs, past and present.

**Figure 22**

*Jóvenes Working Together and Sketching on and Around a Large Canvas*
Following this, emotions were unleashed when a song prompted quiet tears from one of the jóvenes. The seven other jóvenes in the group immediately mobilized to pause the song and to offer comfort to the tearful jóven. We all attended to her, and the group vowed never to play that song again in class. Drawing from the kind of family and community spirituality and obligation modeled by their mothers, the jóvenes attended to each other’s needs to “prosper together and sobrevivir” (Trinidad Galván, 2006, p. 175).

With the continuous proliferation of trust and safety, the taller surfaced additional snapshots about the intimate lives of the youth and elicited demonstrations of communal support. Unanticipated personal disclosures emerged from jóvenes who did not typically volunteer intimate details about their lives. For example, with his requested song—an emotional ballad—playing in the background, Hugo spoke with Alex while both remained fixated on their painting.

Hugo: Hey Alex, remember what happened to your grandpa, bro?

Alex: Oh god!

Hugo: The same thing is happening to my grandpa, bro.

Alex: Aw.

Hugo: And that’s the truth, bro.

Alex: Damn. I’ll send you the video.

This moment unfolded as we were casually scattered around the canvas sheet. Though it was an exchange specifically between Hugo and Alex, it did not occur privately, and it was well within the earshot of the entire group. With an economy of words, Alex validated Hugo’s experience and offered support by sharing a resource. Before this, Hugo rarely volunteered personal information and spoke sparingly in class.
Furthermore, other faculty told me Hugo was going through a difficult time. During our studio time, however, I often observed Hugo calmly lounging while listening to music, intermittently contributing to the canvas, or singing upbeat tunes and laughing. The taller became a safe space for unburdening himself and finding support from his peers.

Similar to how Hugo responded to the conditions of the studio to confide in our community, Alice’s disclosure arose as response to the subject matter she was painting. As part of her group’s mural, described in greater detail in the following section, Alice was tasked with painting the bars of a jail cell. As she stood next to the canvas on the floor, mixing gray paint in a paper bowl, we engaged in an unexpected plática.

Alice: ¡Maestra! ¡Maestra! My dad is coming back in July. I was gonna wait like 2 more years.

Me: Your dad? Where’s he at?

Alice: Jail. He’s in LA.

Me: Do you get to go see him?

Alice: No, ‘cause my mom hasn’t told my little brother. He’s got just 1 more year till his next—then they have a meeting.

Me: Yep, yep. I get that. How exciting—

Just then, Hugo burst into a loud song to Elton John, making Alice and all of us laugh. At this moment, I was tasked with supporting Alice in the same way the jóvenes had supported each other. I acknowledged Alice’s joy and excitement at the news about her father’s early release and sat beside her to help her paint. Although I had mentioned to the jóvenes earlier in the year that I volunteer with an arts organization supporting incarcerated males, Alice had not shared this information. In this instance, the taller of
sobreviviencia held Alice’s resilience as she endured her father’s time away and her hopeful joy at his accelerated release date.

In a comical pivot following Hugo’s performance of a Backstreet Boys song, Alice employed humor casero, humor of the home space, (Villenas, 2005), to invoke collective storytelling through pláticas about mothers and other pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Despite their animated conversations, the jóvenes remained focused on their work, rarely looking up from their field of painting on the canvas (see Figure 23).

**Figure 23**

_Afterschool Outdoor Painting Session_

*Note.* A joven paints the bars on a jail cell while another paints rungs on a ladder.
Alice: *Maestra*, last time, my mom–In the morning, my mom went to the bathroom and she lasted 30 minutes in the bathroom. She literally. Everyday, she’s in the bathroom for 30 minutes.

Hugo: A woman takes like an hour just to get ready, bro. My mom says she has to be at a party at 5:30. We got to the party at 6:30.

Oscar: I know! That’s so true! Parents are always late!

Alex: It’s the mothers!

As a strategy of resilience, these impromptu *pláticas* about the home lives of *jóvenes* imparted humor and tenderness to our creative studio space. The unprecedented displays of vulnerability, deep emotion, and community support among *jóvenes* that emerged in our *taller* exemplified the degree of social support and sense of belonging that defined it as a space of *sobrevivencia*. Consequently, the *jóvenes* regularly requested to prolong their stay in our *taller*, requesting to be excused from their next class, or asking when I could stay after school to host outdoor painting sessions.

**A Resilient Resistance Aesthetic**

As described previously, the studio space burgeoned into a *taller* of *sobrevivencia*. It established the conditions for how the *jóvenes* used art to engage with their schooling experiences. To make visible their spirit of *sobrevivencia*, they created large-scale paintings to harness the educational injustices they experienced and their persistent optimism to survive and succeed (see Figures 24–30). Alongside the painting images presented in this section, I highlight the *jóvenes’* *pláticas* to impart context to the visual and conceptual conventions in their paintings. The *pláticas* are critical for making evident the intellectual theorizing (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) that occurred, the
application of new knowledge from previous inquiry and action projects, the engagement
of policy, and the presence of family histories.

Two Roads: The Good Way and the Raunchy Way

Me: Okay, let’s get some general ideas down.

Liliana: A road. A road. And then it says “keep going,” and then it comes to more
signs.

Me: Who wants to draw the road?

All: Me! Me!

Juno: I think it should be a “Y.”

Maria: Yeah, I want it to be a “Y.”

Figure 24

An Early Draft Depicting the “Y” With Two Roads
Caren: Oh, we could like put the ELD survey here and the actual test and–

Maria: We could do like one side bad–like you’re going in heaven or hell.

Me: What are the signs going to be?

Caren: “Future” and then “wrong track.”

Me: Future, like college?

Caren: Yeah, like college.

Maria: Yeah, college because we’re always on a track, but like, what type of track?

**Figure 25**

*Detail of the Forked Road With Two Tracks*
Me: Where’s the start?

Maria: This is the start because you start as a baby and you have dreams, and then you start going, and then when you get into school, then you go separate ways. I believe that this one should be the “good way” because it has a better space and this one’s kind of like a little raunchy, so that should be the EL way.

**Figure 26**

*Detail of Dreams Inspired by the Poetry Jóvenes Created*

Me: So the EL way is the raunchy way?

Maria: Yeah.

Me: So, what do you want to put at the start?

Juno: Put everything like beautiful like flowers and butterflies.

Caren: I feel like this part should be good and then it gets separated when you start school. This side should be like all flowers and colorful stuff and this side can be kind of dark.

Me: how far should the butterflies go?
Maria: Butterflies and everything should go on the side and on the track.

Juno: Exactly. So we can put a little caterpillar and put “kindergarten.”

Maria: No, but you get into ELD when you start school though. Because then you start to get tested. So it should be a baby growing.

Juno: Can I make the baby?

Cristina: As soon as the flowers and it gets to here, you should have like–

Juno: Yeah, like raunchy.

Me: Which one is the ELD road?

Maria: This one because it might look all good but it’s tricking you.

**Figure 27**

*Detail of the Start of the “Raunchy Way”*

*Note.* Where the ELD road commences, embellished with thorns, black handprints, a figure who has fallen off a bike, and a sign indicating no future.
Me: You can fill this part with all of the beautiful things from your childhood—canciones, dichos, the funny songs your family sang to you.

Cristina: I’m drawing La Vaca Lola.

Liliana: The path before the school is the happy childhood.

Figure 28

Detail Depicting the Prelude to Being Labeled, Tracked, and Tested

Note. Butterflies, handprints, and La Vaca Lola represent childhood memories and happiness.
Maria: I like the thorns.

Me: What is the concept up there?

Cristina: It’s like out of this world.

Amaya: Yeah, it’s like out of this world and then like rocks on the road. The space.

Liliana: No judgment.

Cristina: That’s so good!

Liliana: I know, I just said it.

Amaya: Can we do a galaxy in this section?

Me: So what are you guys going to do there?

All: The Galaxy of No Judgment!

**Figure 29**

*Figure 29 shows a kid's art of the Galaxy of No Judgment with a caterpillar, butterflies, and sun along the sides.*
We Find What We Need: Breaking Through With Cucharas and Tenedores

In this section, I highlight the work of another group of jóvenes who painted their resilience, hope, and inventiveness as tactics for survival. I begin with a vignette describing the significant contributions of one joven who was responsible for shaping how the group imagined their schooling experiences (see Figures 31–37). I accentuate her story not only because it exemplifies how the arts can replace reluctance with inspiration but also because her deeply reflective sensibilities ignited the group’s artistry and resolve.

Iris typically entered our ELD space begrudgingly and spent the first 8 weeks of our time together minimally engaged. One of the few times she spoke in class was about Eduardo’s case study to remark on the embarrassment experienced by English learners (ELs) who could not pass the ELPAC. I refrained from asking Iris to share her thoughts,
fearing it would seem impertinent. Having noticed that she spent much of her time doodling and sketching, I waited patiently for the moment when we would transition to art making, and I would invite her to lead us in this effort. One week before launching the studio, I approached her privately after class and proposed the idea. Iris’s face lit up as she embraced this opportunity and began to describe an incisive account of her vision.

The next day, I equipped her with a sketchbook and a planning sheet for articulating her ideas and listing the materials she required. What Iris conceptualized (see Figure 31) clarified her reserved participation in class and revealed an emotionally charged response to the systemic harms she had endured.

**Figure 31**

*Pair of Sketches Created by Iris*
Me: Iris is going to lead us in talking about her design idea since she is our art director.

Alex: How come she’s in charge? I have ideas too.

Me: She’s getting us started and then you can add your own ideas too as long as it is good with her. Go ahead, Iris.

Iris: I decided to make a painting to represent us like if it was a prison and we were stuck there for all the years we had been in it, and like we had been trying to escape to pass our goal. The kids who are not [ELs] are laughing at them on the free side. You’re trying to climb up to the top. It shows like it was your goal but at the bottom it is very dark. The top is their goal that they’ve been waiting for—like a life goal or a job. In the walls of the prison, you know how people take a long time to pass [the ELPAC] and how prisoners mark down their days that they have been in there? How many days they’ve been trying to pass it—days, years . . .

Alex: So, we could draw some part of a cell, all of us in a cell and there’s like two [non-EL] people saying like “lol” they’re dumb. We could paint that and the other guy says yeah, and then in the next part, we could draw another cell how like it’s getting worse. Like how the cell is all stinky or worse, or like rotted and the cops come again and say the same thing. And then in the second cell, we draw at night an idea like how to escape. And then at the end we draw—we’re still stuck in the cell. We break the ceiling and then we build a ladder and then—I don’t know how, but we build a ladder and then we escape.
**Figure 32**

*Detail of ELs in a Jail Cell*

*Note.* Amid tally marks documenting their time as ELs, and the breach in the top left corner for escape.

Oscar: I like that idea.

Alex: What if there’s two ladders where one side, which is the non-ELs, has to go through one ladder and the other ones has to go through another ladder. And then when they get at the top, there’s like a slide for the non-ELs and right there, there’s another ladder for the other [EL] people so they have to keep climbing.

Me: So, if that’s the case, we might have to do it his way [vertically] so that it keeps going higher and higher.

Alex: Can I add to his idea?

Me: Sure.
Alex: What he said. We keep going up and then for the non-ELs, they could just go down the slide like fine, they passed. How about each one of us is failing so the ladder breaks for them, and they have to go back to the beginning and reset. And like at the end, how about for the non-ELs it’s like halfway and then the wall is over for them. And then for us, like it’s longer. The wall is at the end, and we could escape.

Alice: Maestra, that looks like the border.

Me: So, over here, you’ve got the ELs, and they’ve made it and then–

Oscar: What if they fell?

Hugo: Yeah, falls back down!

Oscar: What if we made the wall more bigger on their side?

Alex: I like Oscar’s idea–like more walls for us, less walls for them non-ELs.
Figure 33

*Detail of Wall Cobblestones Featuring Quotes From the Jóvenes Throughout Class Sessions*

*Note.* These quotes were selected as part of a coding activity where *jóvenes* first coded the quote, provided additional words or phrases about the quote, and finally decided on whether to include the quote on their painting.
Figure 34

Two Ladders Representing Two Tracks

*Note.* (Left) Detail of a non-EL reaching the top of the ladder and going down a slide in victory. (Right) Detail of ELs traversing a treacherous wall and broken ladder as one falls after nearly reaching the top of the wall.

Me: One thing I loved that Iris had was the tally marks.

Alex: How about we just connect that to a jail cell like at the bottom? Behind the cell is the wall and we break the ceiling and then start climbing up the wall.

Me: So down here is like a dungeon?
Alex: That’s like the depressed.

Oscar: I could add something very dark, but it might be too dark.

Me: There’s nothing too dark. This is art.

Oscar: What if we put a cemetery that people did not pass through?

Me: So, they die?

Oscar: That’s why I said it’s dark, or maybe angels on that side helping them?

Alex: I can draw the details on our ladder. I want to draw snakes, cracks, and—

Oscar: What if we add like right here the ladder like halfway for fifth to third grade and then there’s like a little break, but once you get into sixth to eighth grade, there’s no break so you can’t rest, so you just stay there. What if they’re building the ladder with the resources they have in the jail cell?

Alice: Can you play Bad Bunny?

Everyone: No!

Me: Who’s making the rungs?

Oscar: What’s that?

Me: The rungs are the *palitos* on the ladder that you step on.

Hugo: *Los palos pequeños de la escalera.* Alex, we should take pictures of ourselves looking like prisoners, actually.

Me: So, talk to me. What’s going on here on the ladder?

Oscar: We have like spoons, forks, broken stuff.

Alex: Those are spoons and forks we found on the floor and we’re using them to carve open the ceiling of the jail to escape.

Misa: Wait, should I put days, weeks, months, years?
Oscar: Where are we going to put the ice cream?

Alex: At the way bottom so that’s where they get the energy from. “Energy Ice Cream.” And label it at the side, Oscar, “Energy Ice Cream.”

Oscar: Alex, Alex. Should I add Pokémon?

Alex: Depends. Which one?

Oscar: Should I add some peppers?

Alex: No!
Figure 36

*Details Showing the Treat-Laden Non-EL Ladder Collaged With Images of Ice Cream and Spicy Hot Chips*
In their composition, the *jóvenes* imagined two very different types of ladders to represent the two schooling tracks (see Figures 34 and 36). Like the *jóvenes* in the previously described painting who conceptualized a “Y” that forks to divert them onto a dark path of obstacles and gloom (see Figures 24-30), the *jóvenes* in this composition created a dilapidated ladder with broken rungs juxtaposed with the treat-laden ladder enjoyed by non-ELs (see Figure 36). Importantly, despite the imprisonment and difficult climb they have imagined for themselves (see Figures 33 and 34), they also contrived a way out. By using the “resources they have in the jail” such as the “spoons, forks, and broken stuff,” the *jóvenes* forged a way out (see Figures 32 and 35). As mentioned in the opening vignette by Adrienne Maree Brown, the *jóvenes* made the most with the least as a testament to their inventive resilience and imagination. They refused to submit to captivity imposed by labeling, testing, and tracking. Instead, they found a way around, while fully understanding that the struggle of falling one point short of the test’s cutoff score might mean falling from the highest point of the wall. In their visual oeuvres (see Figures 30 and 37), the *jóvenes* evolved a resilient resistance aesthetic—one which captures the biting injustices endured, the heartbreak of defeat, and the tenacious spirit to get back up and keep climbing.
Figure 37

Completed Painting
Los Jóvenes Educados: Poetic Self-Portraits

Similar to how the jóvenes’ paintings expressed their desire and resolve to succeed, the resilient resistance aesthetic manifested in textual art forms as one of the tasks carried out during our last days of the semester together. Expressed in the jóvenes’ own words, the following poetic overtures offer kaleidoscopic glimpses into their rich lives and complex identities. Using a template based on George Ella Lyon’s “Where I’m From” poem, the jóvenes made use of sentence frames in English on one side of the paper and frames in Spanish on the other side. The instructions recognized and celebrated the jóvenes as multilingual and explicitly encouraged them to make use of their full linguistic repertoire and “mix in all of your languaging styles.”

**Oscar**
I am from PS4
From street lights
and other people
I am from America
from “tienes tarea”
I’m from carne asada fries
I’m from video games
And mom, dad, and dogs
And my dream for me is to make things like steak

**Alice**
I am from la Virgen de Guadalupe
From stop sign
and bike
I am from La Mesa
from nina, fea, mande, ¿qué?
I’m from pozole and Zombie Takis
I’m from making tik toks with my little cousin
and Josefina and Joseph
And my dream for me is to be a lawyer or nail tech
Iris
I am from plates, cups, food, water, forks, and spoons
from trees
and grass
I am from America
from “Hi”
I’m from tacos, burritos, tortas, and chilaquiles
I’m from phone
and mom, dad, and siblings
And my dream for me is to become an engineer

Alex
I am from trees, dirt, Nintendo Switch
from plants, stairs, and wood
and other people
I am from America
from “Bruh, do you see that?”
I’m from tacos, ramen, and pizza
I’m from video games
and mom, dad, two brothers, one sister, one dog
And my dream for me is to be the best chef

Hugo
I am from electronics
from vegetables
and rocks and trees
I am from Mexico
from hello, good morning, good afternoon
I’m from carne asada
I’m from video games
and Violeta
And my dream for me is to be part of the army

Misa
I am from books, TV, and pictures
from metal
and signs
I am from California
from “ur mom”
I’m from white rice
I’m from drawing
and mom, dad, and sister
And my dream for me is to become a therapist
Eva
I am from bed
From leaves
and flowers
I am from EEUU
from ¡Ay, no!
I’m from tacos, tamales, pozole, and menudo
I’m from watching tik toks
And Mama, Papa, Danny, Agus, and Nana
And my dream for me is to become a teacher

Violeta
I am from toys
From cars
and people
I am from El Salvador
from ¡Hola!
I’m from ramen
I’m from escuchar musica
And Hugo
And my dream for me is to be responsible and ser policia

Caren
I am from Hello Kitty
From a dead rat
and a cigarette
I am from a hospital
from “Stop copying me!”
I’m from birria, mole, enchilada
I’m from spend my money
and my whole family
And my dream for me is to be a lawyer

Amaya
I am from una cama
from sigarro
and cervesas
I am from hospital
from “¿Que manera?”
I’m from comida China
I’m from singing
and friends and family
And my dream for me is to be a singer and ser buena en la violin
**Liliana**
I am from a stuffed frog
From a car
and a blossom tree
I am from a hospital
from “Did I ask? No.”
I’m from In-and-Out
I’m from hanging out with friends
and family
And my dream for me is to be an actress

**Cristina**
I am from salsa
From trees
and people
I am from La Mesa
from La Vaca Lola
I’m from tacos de birria
I’m from soccer
and from mom, dad, and grandma
And my dream for me is to be a nail artist

**Maria**
I am from speaker, tortillas, salsa, La Rosa de Guadalupe, crystals, tools, and chanclas
from fire pit, trucks, and basketball
and the long tall mountains
I am from mom’s belly
from ¿mende? ¿porque? Ven para aca
I’m from carne asada fries, pizza, wings, and fries
I’m from use the phone, sleep, talk with friends and family
and Basiliso, great grandma, Elene
And my dream for me is to be a veterinarian

**Juno**
I am from a television
from bikes
and trees
I am from California
from “Are we there yet?”
I’m from tacos
I’m from shopping
and mi mama, sister, and dad
And my dream for me is to own my own company
**Carlitos**
I am from TV, bed, furniture, and couch
from cars, wheels, and cats
and weird people
I am from the northeast county
from Amigos, Kalak, and Little Caesar
I’m from mole, hamburger, and morisqueta
I’m from watch TV and play drums
and mom, dad, brother, and sister
And my dream for me is to be famous

**Giovanni**
I am from farol, couch, and console
from carros abandonados
and perros
I am from Mexicali
from “¡Giovanni!”
I’m from pizza de Costco
I’m from fútbol Americano
and Mama, Papa, Mathias
And my dream for me is ser manejador de empresa

**Mario**
I am from television, console, juegos
from a chihuahua
and a dog on the roof
I am from Mexico
I am from “con permisito dijo monchito”
from quesadilla and pollo en barquillo
I’m from jugar videojuegos y jugar afuera
and Taliha, Papa, y hermana
and my dream for me is escribir mejor en ingles y no fallar en el escuela

**Fernando**
I am from TV and Nintendo Switch
from trees and houses
and bushes
I am from here
from “Don’t go up the hill”
I’m from pizza, pozole, and tacos
I’m from play soccer
and my mom and family
And my dream for me is to play professional soccer
Jackson
I am from TV, phone, my Xbox
from trees
and cars
I am from Guatemala
from “Homework. Do it.”
I’m from pizza, burger, fries
I’m from watch TV and eat food
and Mom, Papa, brother
And my dream for me is to be a doctor or a music player

These intimate compositions exemplify a resilient resistance aesthetic showcasing
the abundant cultural, familial, and community resources from which jóvenes drew
strength and power. Through meticulously curated words, youth offered visceral
expressions of place, sound, family, nourishment, and dreams to craft dignified,
humorous, and evocative poetic sketches. In creating these individual poetic works, they
generously shared details about their lives and dreams that did not necessarily emerge in
our pláticas. For example, most jóvenes had not disclosed their professional aspirations,
many of which necessitated a college education. Returning to Trinidad Galván’s (2006)
notion of sobrevivencia, the last line in these poems reflects the jóvenes’ “hopes and
dreams in creative and joyful ways” (p.163) as beyond the desire to merely survive.

Conclusion

After engaging with the findings from their studies, the jóvenes operationalized
their newly acquired oppositional vocabulary to conceptualize a political response
through collective art making. The resulting material productions included emotionally
charged large-scale canvas paintings and intimate self-portrait poems. In addition to
actualizing political stances through artistic products, a marked transformation occurred
as the jóvenes shaped their arts-based taller space in ways that signaled their physical,
mental, and emotional liberation from reductive schooling experiences. Compelled by highly personal, passionate, and political art-making purposes, the jóvenes emboldened their collective resolve by discursively sharpening the meaning making of their lived experiences to devise visual and poetic renderings executed in a resilient resistance aesthetic. In this way, the jóvenes fortified the relational space that had begun in this study’s first and second phases for speaking freely, knowledgeably, and agentively in ways that clouded that we were within the walls of an ELD classroom
CHAPTER SEVEN

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In a culminating *encuentro*, marking the start of the Spring semester, the *jóvenes* presented their paintings to the network’s TK–8 certificated and administrative staff. To commence the testing season and training on the English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC), the network’s leadership invited the *jóvenes* to present their semester-long work to inculcate purpose and urgency among staff. It was their hope that these youth counterstories would raise consciousness among the schools’ educators who are responsible for the outcomes of bi/multilingual students in their classrooms and beyond. The *jóvenes* spoke for 15 minutes providing visual and spoken *testimonios* of the harms they endured over the years. They explained how their stresses were corroborated by the literature and findings from their inquiry projects. They also described how they synthesized their new knowledge with their embodied knowledge through visual expressions (see Figure 38).

As they guided adult viewers through their paintings, the docent *jóvenes* revealed the presence of destructive policies and practices permeating their canvases. They spoke about insidious policies that “trick” families with precarious Home Language Surveys and uphold them as absolute. They also highlighted parts of their canvases that depicted the dreams they were born with and nurtured throughout their childhood. In metaphorical terms, the *jóvenes* recounted their perilous journey ascending a fractured ladder and then falling short of the passing threshold by one point. They narrated their violent fall to the bottom, realizing the test had again changed and become more difficult. With gasps,
nods, and sighs, educators listened as the jóvenes “talked back” to a test and a system that continues to confine and devalue their ways of being, languaging, and dreaming.

**Figure 38**

*Teacher Encuentro and Professional Development Training for Administering the ELPAC*

In this final chapter, I summarize key ideas and findings from this dissertation and revisit the framework I fashioned to guide my exploration of bi/multilingual youth “talking back” to the system that has labeled, tracked, and assessed them. I then offer ruminations and pose questions I believe can inspire enhanced practices and further inquiry on reimagining English language development (ELD) spaces as sites for cultivating youth critical consciousness and agency. I draw attention to the incongruities between policies and practices purported to serve “English learners” and the derivative
testing and tracking microaggressions enacted on youth to emphasize implications for reform. Lastly, in recalling Yosso’s (2000) discussion of resilient resistance to understand how youth respond to various stresses, I invite creative pedagogical interventions that nourish and cultivate Latinx youth’s resilience and critical consciousness for exacting acts of resistance beyond survival (Trinidad Galván, 2006).

Main Ideas and Findings

This dissertation explored how a critical framework grounded in resilient resistance pedagogy, youth-led inquiry and action, and the arts might reframe dominant deficit schooling experiences of bi/multilingual Latinx youth labeled long-term English learners (LTELs). By centering youth voices, knowledges, and experiences, I co-fashioned an affirming space alongside youth marked by pláticas and art. To disrupt dominant ideologies that devalue the languaging practices of bi/multilingual Latinx youth, especially those who have been in U.S. schools for 6 or more years, my framework opened fissures in traditional ELD settings by explicitly calling attention to subjugating testing and labeling mechanisms. More importantly, in operationalizing resilient resistance across this framework, I elicited critical understandings that moved youth from defensive postures that measured their greater sense of belonging and self-efficacy according to their performance on a language test, to offensive postures that scrutinized the test’s integrity and validity. Sanctioning youth to exercise an oppositional discourse from within the institutional space they are challenging takes aim at the linguistic hegemonies and deficit discourses outlined in my literature review and critical framework.
Spanning the study’s three phases, sustained dialogue through various modes of languaging nourished our relationships and our collective resilience. These pláticas also ushered in a burgeoning critical consciousness among youth about existing linguistic, racial, and cultural hierarchies and the policies that uphold them. Moreover, in operationalizing critical translingual approaches throughout our pláticas, the jóvenes theorized various languaging repertoires across the various contexts they navigate, especially the in-between spaces. Thus, through communicative repertoire approaches (Rymes et al., 2016; Schaefer & Warhol, 2020) and transraciolinguisitc approaches (Smith, 2019) where one possesses and selects from a variety of languaging practices according to context, as in the use of academic English on the ELPAC, the jóvenes appraised the vast repertoire of languages they possessed and the boundless ways in which these could be wielded.

The integration of comics consolidated the legitimacy and richness of each mode and topic of communication the jóvenes brought to our space. In this way, comics offered unique affordances (Kuttner et al., 2021) for youth to interact with the theoretical and analytical underpinnings in the researcher’s comic memos and intervene in meaning-making processes. In weaving in comics with pláticas, I found it possible to reclaim youth voices and reposition them as knowledgeable through multimodal storytelling. As a move to uncover/recover, and amplify hidden and silenced voices (Elenes, 1997), comics served as microaffirming tools for capturing, legitimizing, and collectively reflecting on the spoken and the embodied that surfaced in our pláticas with pictures and text. Thus, comics afforded opportunities to affirm the lived experiences of bi/multilingual Latinx youth and democratize how knowledge is produced and distributed with and by youth.
collaborators. Further, the resilient resistance pedagogy I found enabled youth participants to speak freely, knowledgeably, and agentively when a cycle of eliciting, memorializing, and reflecting occurred through *pláticas* and comics.

My findings further illustrate when youth arrive at inquiry after understanding they are knowledgeable and free to express their meaning making in safe and nurturing spaces, they can be poised to exercise their agency to engage in political praxis. From the onset, my framework transferred power and social responsibility to youth by situating the *jóvenes* as *personas educadas* (Rendón, 2011). In recognizing their intellectual wisdom and integrity through *pláticas* and comics, they were positioned as experts on their own lives. Nourishing their sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and social support within our space of learning imparted the *jóvenes* with agency to decenter standard English as superior and to examine its racist underpinnings critically as the language of whiteness (Delpit, 2006; Godley et al., 2007; Labov, 1969; Leonardo, 2004; Macedo, 1991; Valdes, 1996). With this foregrounding in the second phase, the *jóvenes* were positioned in a posture of resistance for engaging in YPAR. They critically interrogated the Home Language Survey, the design and authority of the ELPAC, and paltry assessment score reports to unmask how these contribute to the subjugation of Latinx families.

As the *jóvenes* became increasingly politicized, they moved beyond interrogating oppressive structures to taking action against them. Instances such as the *encuentro* above mark key moments in which *jóvenes* harnessed their voices to speak out against injustices with adult stakeholders. These politicized conversations also occurred when the *jóvenes* brought their concerns directly to a state assemblymember to advocate for change in policies about home language surveys and to problematize the power of language
assessments over their bodies and minds. In such moments, the jóvenes spoke directly to policymakers and the teaching and learning community across their school’s network to recruit witnesses and allies in their testing and tracking struggles. Thus, the jóvenes used their voices, knowledge, and creative expressions to dismantle deficit narratives that held them accountable to flawed policies grounded in white middle-class values. Beyond talking back to the test, these youth talked out to policymakers and community stakeholders in a resolute political stance. Positioning themselves as lobbyists on behalf of themselves, their families, and bi/multilingual Latinx communities, the jóvenes redirected the onus of their successes and failures to adult actors with the power to act in complicity or to challenge the policies in place.

Reimagining ELD Spaces

This dissertation highlights the need for educators to rethink how language is taught within ELD spaces for centering and elevating the voices of bi/multilingual learners as dignified, knowledgeable, and agentive. More importantly, it highlights the importance of educators cultivating relationships with bi/multilingual learners that receive and attend to the material, the affective, and the embodied in their lives. This requires a restructuring of commitments that not only reframes bi/multilingual learners as jóvenes educados but also implores educators to confront the labeling, testing, and tracking microaggressions on behalf of and along with their students. In response to these provisions, I proposed a way to imagine an affirming space for honoring the knowledge and languaging practices of jóvenes educados through creative and transformational learning opportunities. The responsive and fluid curriculum afforded jóvenes the tools to cultivate their voice and agency with purpose and resolve. Yet, at the heart of this work
were the *pláticas* and the presence of art. *Pláticas* allowed us to engage in a collective critical discourse for eliciting, troubling, and working through endured microaggressions to recover and replenish *jóvenes*’ reserves of resilience. The arts legitimized and affirmed the spoken and lived experiences of *jóvenes* and afforded them a platform for fashioning collective creative responses to their experienced stresses.

**Ruminations**

The idea of adults obstructing student voices became evident during my process of analytic comic-making. I often found myself overly drawn throughout a single comic page and addressed this by removing myself from the dominant panel space. Instead, I repositioned myself peeking through a corner or behind a panel border with an emerging dialogue balloon containing my spoken words (see Figure 19). My deliberate efforts to reserve primary panel spaces for the *jóvenes* and carefully document their recorded utterances brought awareness to the unearned agency with which adults with power impose their recommendations, mandates, and opinions over the lives of bi/multilingual youth. These adults include researchers, policymakers, school administrators, educators, and parents. This consciousness coincided with words spoken by the *jóvenes* about their lack of agency in determining what they needed and the respect they wanted.

Although abundant scholarship exists on bi/multilingual youth experiences and voices, youth participatory action research, youth and arts, and studies on various types of testing, more work is needed to address the oppressive structures that remain in place after the research is over. For bi/multilingual youth, their families, and caring educators in this dissertation who must grapple with the realities of surviving and succeeding amid the indefinite policies and practices, eliciting critical consciousness, and generating
advocacy narratives are insufficient. The *jóvenes* will face the tangible reality of a test whose power they now fully comprehend. Therefore, this work demands authentic reciprocity to see through what the researcher has begun and contribute something in the way of strategy. In the next section, I present the *Taller* epilogue to detail my final intervention and bring attention to complex issues that remain in need of addressing as we move forward in this work. For administrators and practitioners in the classroom, this discussion on outcomes resulting from a pedagogy of Resilient Resistance is most useful.

**Taller Epilogue and Outcomes: Proving Them Wrong**

Yosso (2000) conceptualized “proving them wrong” as a tool Chicanas/os employ for responding to microaggressions. Because students expressed determination to overcome the ELPAC because of their experienced microaggressions, embodied knowledge, and burgeoning critical consciousness, this work became more complex and took on greater urgency. Several conflicting threads requiring careful negotiation across cultural, linguistic, political, and relational lines came into view. These included driving a curriculum and pedagogy that affirmed the voices and experiences of the *jóvenes*, the test’s institutional hegemony and how it shapes students’ perceptions of themselves and their languaging practices, and my role and responsibility in preparing students with the impugned English language skills they needed to confront the test in the spring.

During the final 3 weeks of this study, our test-prep approaches moved in and out of congruence with the contours of critical linguistic and postcolonial paradigms. Still, I argue, despite tensions between my critical theoretical framing and the approaches taken to prepare for the ELPAC, my commitment to affirm the expressed wishes and interests of *jóvenes* propelled my efforts. Therefore, our last days’ pedagogical and curricular
moves can be interpreted as sustaining the same white supremacist patriarchy this work seeks to dismantle. To mitigate the dangers of becoming dichotomized into colonizer versus liberated consciousness (Spivak, 1988), I invoke Latina/Chicana feminisms to call attention to the contradictions Latinx mothers and maestras must navigate. Forced binaries such as these threaten the survival of our children in a society that does not honor them. These contradictions also arose from the jóvenes who, through their pláticas, paintings, and poetry, shared what they wanted, what they hoped for, and what they needed. Their complicated negotiations of who they are in relation to the test they are forced to take became central to our work and paralleled the complexities associated with Borderland pedagogies (Anzaldúa, 1987; Elenes, 2006), specifically the concept of the third space and the movement of identities across various centers of power (Pérez, 1999). Therefore, the jóvenes understood the paradox (Anzaldúa, 1987; Elenes, 1997) of being an EL in relation to a tested standard English and not being an EL when taking into account their multiple English(es) and the fact they were born and raised in this country.

The deeply relational pedagogy of resilient resistance cultivated across the three phases of this study established conditions for an affirming learning space to mitigate the subtractive nature of test-prep pedagogies. This was essential for the final strike to operationalize what I call a critical test-prep pedagogy (Rodríguez, 2013) that occurred on our collective terms. With the ELPAC upon us, our time focused on preparing the jóvenes for the test’s listening, speaking, reading, and writing sections in strategic and transparent approaches for obtaining a minimum passing score in each section.

As part of a critical test-prep pedagogy, the jóvenes applied their knowledge and consciousness to revisit granular reports from their reading assessments. They examined
their past scores using information from the network database that the testing coordinator provided. The jóvenes and I collaboratively strategized individualized plans that calculated minimum scores needed to capitalize on their strengths, usually speaking and writing, to offset their weaknesses in listening and reading. Our critical test-prep strategy deconstructed the test questions to review scoring rubrics, unmask patterns, and formulate generic sentence frames that would earn them a passing score across each task. For example, in the Speaking section, the jóvenes received coaching on generating patterned responses that would earn top scores according to the anchors in the practice test rubrics. In this way, the jóvenes constantly “put the test in its place” by vocalizing its reductive design and intention. I argue, in the same way affluent communities hire tutors or pay for SAT-prep courses for their children, we could apply critical test-prep approaches to prepare for the ELPAC in deliberate and transparent fashion. Once again, summoning my cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998), my work in one of the most affluent communities in New York’s Upper East Side operated in this way. We halted our project-based work each year to train for 1 week for the state’s English language arts assessment. In situating this test as a required nuisance, the entire middle school community of students, educators, and parents understood why we temporarily engaged in dissonant test-prep activities that clashed with our regular project-based curriculum. More than a nuisance, I maintain the stakes from the ELPAC are higher for the jóvenes in this context because of the endured microaggressions and absolute control the test exerts over their minds and bodies.
Reflection and Recommendations on Resilient Resistance in ELD Spaces

When done poorly or subtractively, ELD classrooms can be dangerous spaces for bi/multilingual youth. In the case of Justice Prep Academy, the reason for disengagement or the sense of marginalization students experienced stemmed from the knowledge that they had been on a different track since preK. Their experienced exclusion resulted from HLS responses, being labeled ELs, ELD-tracked, and tested with the ELPAC. In this section, I outline potentially promising recommendations for various stakeholders serving bi/multilingual learners based on key understandings from this study.

From Directors to Producers: (Re)imagining the Roles of Teachers

To (re)imagine something means more than making small tweaks or novel infusions. (Re)imagining means starting with a freshly primed blank canvas and perhaps a familiar chromatic repertoire of paints on a palette, waiting to be activated in new ways with bold brushstrokes. As this study demonstrated, relinquishing my authority as a teacher to free and cultivate youth imagination through unfettered talk, inquiry, and art was a step toward new and (re)imagined ways of teaching. Creating these conditions required surrendering my control over the curriculum, my research agenda, the jóvenes’ ways of languaging, and my traditional teaching, learning, and classroom management training as an educator. It also required accepting the discomfort of bewildered or disapproving glances from adult passersby at the frenetic energy and spirited conversation of the jóvenes. Above all, this work required relentless lobbying and deal-brokering with various stakeholders to fulfill youth’s requests for materials, opportunities, and experiences.
The film and television metaphors of a director and producer are helpful for understanding how we might (re)imagine teaching and learning. When youth drive learning, they become the directors. They also determine the creative vision, have complete creative control over a project, and should have a strong personal or emotional connection to the material (MasterClass, 2021). On the other hand, the teacher assumes the role of producer and procures resources, handles all the logistics, protects the director’s vision, and does whatever it takes to get the project done. On a set, the director and producer roles are most vital to a project’s successful creation and completion of a project. These roles, however, necessitate a great deal of trust and must work synergistically through “strong coordination and teamwork” (MasterClass, 2021).

To further frame how we might apply an innovative approach to student-teacher relationships, MasterClass (2021) offered the following descriptions of director and producer roles:

The main difference between a producer and a director is that a producer will handle the business components of filmmaking, while the director is mostly concerned with the creative aspects of the entire production. The producer can provide feedback or pitch creative elements, but their role is usually more concerned with logistics. Similarly, a director may also have a hand in deciding certain logistical aspects, like scheduling shoot days, and creatively stretching the budget. Their roles can sometimes overlap, but ultimately, a producer’s job is to provide support and accessibility, so a director can execute the vision of the film.

In my role as producer, I concerned myself with materializing the dreams and requests of the jóvenes, despite sometimes feeling uneasy about inconveniencing others
or calling in special favors to accommodate complicated requests. Often, this occurred during the YPAR phases when the jovenes sought to survey or interview students and staff during the instructional day or on weekends. Consequently, I regularly spoke with teachers and staff to lobby for our projects, handed out small favors, and offered to support them in their classrooms. When the jovenes requested an audience with policymakers, I had to harness my sense of agency and overcome entitlement insecurities that threatened our right to be heard. I also had to build lessons addressing the vocabulary, speaking, and writing skills needed to craft a compelling letter to get us noticed. To accomplish this, I drew strength from my role as a producer to do whatever it took to get the project done.

In another example, the jovenes wanted to present their YPAR projects at a research symposium hosted by my university. With 2 days remaining before Spring Break, I quickly mobilized to coordinate with school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and university personnel. For some time, the jovenes implored me to find an audience for their research, and I was adamant about following through. Still, materializing their request required coordinating several moving parts quickly to create presentation posters, construct scaffolds for their monumental paintings, and attend to minor details such as scheduling, transportation, personalized badges, and lunch. Thus, acting as a producer required behind-the-scenes tenacity to execute the jovenes’ vision.
Traditionally, teachers are the classroom directors, and students are the actors. Thus, in (re)imaging student–teacher roles, educators must look for ways to move away from paradigmatic roles that frame teachers as directors. Rather than controlling the actors and the set in terms of the way learning is designed and executed, teachers should assume the role of producer and clear obstacles that impede the director’s vision. Likewise, students should no longer be relegated to roles as actors but should be positioned as agentive directors. In the following sections, I further outline ways teachers can act as producers to empower youth.

**Seeking Out and Sharing Privileged Information**

Across our work, the jóvenes made clear the urgency and importance of passing the ELPAC to free themselves of their EL designation. Nonetheless, my efforts to capture
a literacy baseline for students who demonstrated strong oral language in English revealed significant gaps in foundational reading skills impeding access to grade-level content; however, this phenomenon was not specific to the EL group. These factors point to the need for teachers to gather and share “good data” with students to help them understand where they are in relation to grade-level expectations. This way, data are democratized and addressed with student–teacher agreements and action. Moreover, when students are equipped with their own data, they become agentive participants. In this posture, they can critically understand how they are situated in a larger system that selectively honors particular language and literacy skills while dismissing others.

**Teaching Youth to Use All Their Crayons**

Resilient resistance hinges upon students’ ability to survive and succeed. After one semester of working with this group of *jóvenes* and learning more about their future aspirations, college and career goals, surviving and succeeding for them included adding high levels of academic English to their linguistic repertoires. However, making this happen does not have to become an undignified, uncritical, and subtractive undertaking. It is possible to marshal all components of bi/multilingual students’ communicative registers as if they were crayons in a box. Depending on the purpose and context, they can summon the appropriate crayon color to serve their needs. Approaching language instruction in this way will make visible all the linguistic tools bi/multilingual youth already possess. It will also highlight how acquiring the “master” language can be useful for achieving a specific end, especially those requiring advocacy and confrontation in white circles. This approach makes no concessions to dominant language ideologies.
Instead, it reframes standard English not as a pedigree replacement for existing languaging practices but as one more crayon in the box to weaponize when needed.

**Embracing Opportunities for Making Community Art**

Infusing the arts into teaching and learning does not require fine arts training. In my study, I learned the most vital component to art making is the construction of the studio as a space for students to *collectively* experiment, create, work through ideas and emotions, make mistakes, and problem solve. For example, releasing students from their desks to work on the floor to engage in the physicality of creating something together can promote strong community relationships through small intimate interactions. An optimal studio space will offer participants a buffet of tools and materials and a menu of project ideas that will appeal to diverse creative proclivities, such as theater, visual arts, photography, poetry, design, and digital arts, to name a few. Aligned with the idea of students as directors, they must be able to exercise agency over the vision and the project. Likewise, as the producer, the teacher can survey students before launching the studio to procure specific materials students request. To enhance the studio experience further and fortify the relational power of the studio, the teacher should endeavor to become a cocreator alongside their students in a parallel project or one co-fashioned with students.

Regarding the use of comics in the classroom, educators can aspire to integrate this art form beyond reading existing published works by others. Instead, we can encourage youth to create their own comics as community-based projects for conveying *testimonios* and personal counterstories of injustices they perceive and experience. Students can take up different roles in the production process of the comics as the *jóvenes* did in this study. For example, when I executed the drawing, other *jóvenes* directed the
design, the dialogue content, and the action. The comics can be published in hardcopy or
digital format and distributed to the community as zines.

**Educational Administrators and Policymakers**

Administrators must possess a deep understanding of language policy and the
machinations of the ELPAC to inspect the data stories and subsequent trajectories of ELs
in their schools and districts. They must bravely audit where student achievement is
stalled in their communities and redistribute the strongest teachers and high-quality
resources to address the gaps, which requires working closely with skilled assessment
coordinators who can interpret data and provide granular analyses of student performance
to design a strategic and appropriate local response informed by community and student
input. Educational leaders also must decisively integrate ELs into mission statements and
theories of action to ensure an explicit and shared commitment to their success.

In the case of Justice Prep Academy, when the network began making more
conscious efforts to address language and literacy gaps among multilingual students
through more intentional approaches to ELD, they were able to exit more students from
their EL status. Finally, acting with urgency and resolve by recruiting support from
stakeholders with power and positioning students at the forefront of this effort so the
most affected youth become leaders in their own social justice movement is imperative
for liberatory outcomes. Policymakers can endeavor to invite the voices of youth to
understand how policies impact their daily lives and conduct critical evaluations for
efficacy. They can also offer sponsorship and funding to local school communities for
YPAR projects that inform policy.
Loophole Pedagogies and Affirming Testing Spaces

At the scholarly, practitioner, and community levels, we must not accept ELD as a lost cause mainly because there exist immovable policies mandating its implementation. We must find ways to work within oppressive structures the way Latinx communities have for centuries. To do this, we must learn the rules and locate the loopholes with the same unapologetic entitlement exhibited in privileged white circles. For example, schools have a great deal of agency in how the ELPAC is deployed. They can determine when, where, how, and with whom students take the test. They can also establish optimal conditions for testing that fashion an affirming space replete with care, edible and nonedible “goodies,” and teachers who administer the test to their own students while encouraging and inspiring them (see Figures 40 and 41).

Figure 40

*Jóvenes in Relaxed Testing Conditions*
As the hallmark of our collective resilient resistance, the jóvenes and I took a prescriptive and mechanical stance, on our terms, to get through the various ELPAC tasks and questions to “treat this test with the same respect it treats us.” For this reason, a commitment to an ethic of resilient resistance was selected for this dissertation. Yosso’s (2000) definition of this concept as surviving and succeeding while the structures of oppression remain in place encompasses the very nature of this work. By foregrounding youth voices through pláticas, and through my own reflective listening and active responsiveness to their expressed convictions and ideas, I discovered the jóvenes supplied the guidance necessary for this work. In mitigating the dissonance between mandated
language policies and practices and the youth purportedly served, the jóvenes proved this work is possible in meaningful, messy, and sometimes incongruous ways. Framing a culminating stance grounded in critical test-prep pedagogy required the work of cultivating trust, self-efficacy, a sense of belonging, and strong social support to fashion resilient and protective armor to confront the assessment and the surrounding mechanisms of oppression.

**Conclusion**

Across this dissertation are multiple visual, textual, and spoken accounts showcasing the resilience of bi/multilingual Latinx youth. They draw from multiple cultural, linguistic, and community resources to sustain their resilience. However, as these bi/multilingual youth continue in their schooling journeys, they endure repeated physical, mental, and emotional raciolinguistic microaggressions through language labeling, tracking, and especially testing. These stresses place their resilience at risk of depletion to levels that threaten the dreams they express in their art and their poetry. Thus, as educators, we must intervene as courageous and visionary advocates to reimagine ELD spaces as affirming and empowering for all students labeled ELs but especially those who are LTELs. This means entering a collaborative relationship with youth to make visible and dismantle the carceral authority of the language test that imprisons them in indefinite EL status, ELD coursework, and ELP testing.

Above all is the collective responsibility to honor the dreams of bi/multilingual Latinx youth. However, this cannot be done unless we first know their dreams. To access that privileged knowledge necessitates a great deal of earned trust so we might also adopt
those dreams with gravity as if they were our own. It also requires we become coconspirators alongside youth, drawn together with love.

Figure 42

*Drawn Together*
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## APPENDIX A

### Definitions of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>comics-based research (CBR)</td>
<td>An emerging field of practice that appeals to researchers across various disciplines and epistemologies, Kuttner et al. (2021) defined CBR as “neither a research methodology (a broad conceptualization of how to approach research) nor a method (a specific practice conducted during research)” (p.196). CBR offers researchers flexible approaches in conducting research in a number of ways, while taking up “an interest in the unique semiotic, narrative, communicative, and educative properties of the comics form for their participants, their audiences, and themselves” (Kuttner et al., 2021, p. 196).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>designated English language development (Designated ELD)</td>
<td>Title 5 California Code of Regulations [CCR] Section 11300[a]) defines this as “instruction provided during a protected time in the regular school day for focused instruction on the state-adopted ELD standards. During Designated ELD, English learners develop critical English language skills necessary for accessing academic content in English.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English learner (EL)</td>
<td>A formal term used in official federal and state documents and contexts to describe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Proficiency Assessment of California (ELPAC)</td>
<td>The California Department of Education (CDE) defines this assessment as “a test used initially to assess English proficiency for students whose home language survey indicated a language other than English. For those identified as EL students, this assessment is given annually until the student reclassifies to fluent English proficient status.” As the first gateway toward reclassification to English fluent, the ELPAC comprises Criterion 1 of 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jóvenes educados</td>
<td>A term used in deliberate resistance to the subtractive labels mapped upon students who are identified as English learners (ELs), long-term English learners (LTELs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>long-term English learner (LTEL)</td>
<td>Students identified as ELs who have been in U.S. schools for 6 or more years and who still have not made sufficient progress, especially in passing the English language proficiency exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personas educadas</td>
<td>Rendón (2011) developed this term to describe dignified, wise, and honorable people who are well respected, regardless of formal education and social class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pláticas</td>
<td>This is the Spanish word for informal conversations. In the context of Latina/Chicana feminist research, Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) define pláticas as a methodology and a way of knowing that shape how research is performed and embodied. Pláticas are grounded in relational principles between researcher and research participants through reciprocity, knowledge co-construction, and spirituality (Fierros &amp; Delgado Bernal, 2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **reclassification** | The California Department of Education (CDE) defines reclassification as “the process whereby a student is reclassified from English learner (EL) status to Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) status. Reclassification can take place at any time during the academic year, immediately upon the student meeting all the criteria.” California Education Code (EC) Section 313 set forth the following four criteria ELs must meet to attain reclassification to English fluent:  
* Criterion 1: Assessment of English Language Proficiency (ELP)  
  English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC)  
* Criterion 2: Teacher Evaluation  
* Criterion 3: Parent Consultation  
* Criterion 4: Basic Skills Relative to English Proficient Students |
| **resilient resistance** | Building on the work of Freire, and Solórzano and Delgado Bernal’s examination of consciousness, motivation and resistance, Yosso (2000) theorizes resilient resistance as surviving and succeeding along the educational pipeline while leaving the structures of domination intact. She describes resilient resistance as generated in the margins of a paradoxical space where the American dream is fraught with experienced inequalities |
| **taller** | This is the Spanish word for workshop or artist studio. I define taller as a workshop space of creative possibility for engaging in both abstract and concrete imagining and dreaming, meaning-making and repurposing of both the material and the conceptual. It is also a place of discovery and affirmation where the artist’s total self-works together to actualize new ideas and rework old ones |
| **test-prep pedagogy** | Rodríguez (2013) developed this term to describe a pedagogical approach and culture born out of a high-stakes standardized testing movement. Primarily impacting schools and communities serving low-income and children of color, test-prep pedagogy is undergirded by low expectations, a narrowed curriculum, and aloof relationships |
| **youth participatory action research (YPAR)** | YPAR is a critical methodology that positions youth participants as owners of knowledge and as producers of knowledge. Through youth-led decision making, youth who are traditionally denied agentive roles are afforded a voice in determining how they will enhance community well-being through inquiry and action |
## APPENDIX B

### English Language Development Arts and YPAR Curriculum at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit learning goal / skill</th>
<th>Guiding questions</th>
<th>Planned activities: Students will show what they know by…</th>
<th>Language goals (bricks and mortar)</th>
<th>Claims addressed/ alignment to ELD framework and EL roadmap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norms Names Research art journal Working as a team</td>
<td>What is this class about? Why norms? How do we build a community together? What is language? What is art? How do we use a research art journal?</td>
<td>Read, revise, recreate draft of norms Name activity RAJ Emojis Join me if… Songs: Not that song/that’s my jam RAJ Survey activity *A page of advice</td>
<td>Norms Art Name Language Third space language pláticas Research journal Taller / workshop</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity: Exploring language and culture</td>
<td>Who are we? Who am I (e.g., when I am alone, when I am with family, when I am at school, when I am with friends) What is our group identity in this space?</td>
<td>Read accounts by various students on how they view themselves and how they feel they are perceived by others Maletas: similar to identity bag activity RAJ Pick a pseudonym RAJ *A page of advice</td>
<td>Labels Designated English language development Maletas v. identity bag Pseudonym</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers, research, and YPAR</td>
<td>What is YPAR? What is the goal? Who is an expert? Who decides who an expert is? Who is an insider (we)? Who is an outsider (they)? Can an outsider be an expert on me?</td>
<td>Acrostic of YPAR and what comes up for me (in journal, embellish, play with words) Read: Rudyard Kipling “We and They” Concentric circles activity for insider/outside: We (e.g., peers, family, teachers) They (adults, teachers, policymakers, researchers who write about we) *A page of advice</td>
<td>(YPAR) Youth participatory action research Paulo Freire Knowledge production Coconstructing Experts Membership outsiders/insiders (We/they)</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce the project: ELPAC</td>
<td>The ELPAC: Why? Just why? What is a problem? Do we want to test a hypothesis or do we want to explore a phenomenon?</td>
<td>Big paper activity: Four stations with ELPAC questions (students annotate and dialogue; emojis encouraged) The Five Whys activity: Asking our way toward critical consciousness Exploring vs. testing *A page of advice</td>
<td>Claims, domains Silent dialogue Framing a problem Thinking critically Hypothesis Phenomenon Case study Explore / exploratory</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing Critical analysis to promote systemic questioning, similar to a problem-posing approach (Freire, 1970/2020)</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify a problem</td>
<td>When it comes to the ELPAC, what do we really want to know? What do we want to find out?</td>
<td>Concept mapping *A page of advice</td>
<td>Define Refine Anchor Preliminary codes</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing vs. exploring</td>
<td>Who are our participants? When conducting research what rights do participants have? What rights do you have? Where are we conducting our research?</td>
<td>Concept mapping Hypothetical role-play: extractor vs. participant *A page of advice</td>
<td>Population sampling Big “N” versus little “n” Consent Rights and responsibilities Ethics Honoring people’s voices Extracting Reciprocity, reciprocate</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research questions: Moving from why to what and how</td>
<td>What kinds of information do we want to collect? What is the best method for collecting what we want to know?</td>
<td>Creating a survey and/or Interview protocol and/or observation protocol *A page of advice</td>
<td>Instruments Survey scale Likert scale Quantitative Qualitative Protocol Interview protocol</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research participants and setting</td>
<td>How do we conduct an interview?</td>
<td>Mock interviews Deploying surveys (digitally or paper-pencil) *A page of advice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing the data</td>
<td>How do we crunch the numbers and show what they mean?</td>
<td>*A page of advice</td>
<td>Quantitative analysis, Validity, Reliability, Coding, Categories, Data representation, Qualitative analysis, Credibility</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Looking for emerging themes</td>
<td>What patterns are coming up from the data? What are we noticing?</td>
<td>*A page of advice</td>
<td>Patterns, Themes emerging</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing findings Conceptualizing action</td>
<td>What is the story the data is telling us? How do we know? Would participants agree with us? How do we tell this data story?</td>
<td>*A page of advice</td>
<td>Narrative, Data narrative, Member checking, Presenting findings</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking action: Art-making workshop / book creating</td>
<td>How can we present our findings in powerful, creative and meaningful ways?</td>
<td>*A page of advice</td>
<td>Rascuache / ratchet, Aesthetics, Teatro, Collage, Telenovelas</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking action: Student presentation / exhibition of work</td>
<td>How can we share our findings and new understandings with others?</td>
<td>*A page of advice</td>
<td>Encuentro, ISBN, Publishing</td>
<td>Speaking, listening, reading, writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus group (summative assessment and reflection)</td>
<td>What worked? What didn’t work? What were some limitations to our study? What advice would we offer others wanting to replicate this study? Did this project change your thinking or views?</td>
<td>Evaluate and reflect on research and overall project, Informal plática as part of the concluding ELD instructional sessions where we reflect as a group on our YPAR project but with a predetermined protocol of questions.</td>
<td>Focus group protocol, Evaluate, Reflect, Replicate, Limitations</td>
<td>Speaking</td>
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</table>
IRB Clearance Form

IRB #: IRB-2022-484
Title: Talking Back to the ELPAC: Resilient Resistance and (Re)Imagining through YP/ART
Creation Date: 5-30-2022
End Date: 
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Zulema Reynoso
Review Board: USD IRB
Sponsor: 

Study History

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<th>Submission Type</th>
<th>Review Type</th>
<th>Decision</th>
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<td>Initial</td>
<td>Expedited</td>
<td>Approved</td>
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<td>Modification</td>
<td>Expedited</td>
<td>Approved</td>
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Key Study Contacts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zulema Reynoso</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:zreynoso@sandiego.edu">zreynoso@sandiego.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia Valenzuela</td>
<td>Primary Contact</td>
<td><a href="mailto:avalenzuela@sandiego.edu">avalenzuela@sandiego.edu</a></td>
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